

FEB.



SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES

**SPACE
BURIAL**

by
**Lew
Merrill**



THE 'SPICY' PULPS

Spicy Adventure Stories was one of the line of pulps in that published series of titles including: Spicy Western Stories, Private Detective Stories, and Spicy Mystery. A few "house ads" for these titles are reproduced, for your edification, in the back of this book.

The 'Spicy' line was first introduced in 1933 and was maintained, by the same publisher, until 1943. The 'Spicy' publications were considered rather "Hot Stuff" in their day. For a fact, many newsstands and magazine stores would not openly display the 'Spicy' titles. More often than not, they were offered as U-T-C (Under-The-Counter) items.

To be sure, there had been other magazine titles whose main content was the more or less implicitly sexy story (e.g. Pep, Snappy Stories). But, to the 'Spicy' pulps go the dubious distinction of being the first to combine the themes of the sexy and the sadistic into a discreet pulp fiction format. From start to finish, this format was faithfully maintained.

Format fiction is the home ground for the hack writer. At times, the 'Spicy's' seemed to have been the product of two or three people using many pseudonyms. Nonetheless, the work of a few of the more prolific perennials of the better than average pulp story (i.e. Robert E. Howard, Henry Kuttner, E. Hoffman Price) would find its way into the 'Spicy' book.

The Spicy Pulps had one unique feature, continuity comic strips that ran on a more or less regular basis. The episode of "Diana Daw" in this book is a fair example of the Spicy Strips.

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SPICY 'ADVENTURE' STORIES



FEBRUARY, 1941

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The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.

SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES

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INDIGO ISLAND



It was all an incredible accident by which Shane found his identity irrevocably confused with that of a dead Mr. Burton, and for a while he didn't know whether his loyalties belonged to the Japanese or to Chiang Kai-Shek. All that he was sure of was that he was falling in love with the girl they called Mr. Li's Number One wife!



By CLIVE TRENT

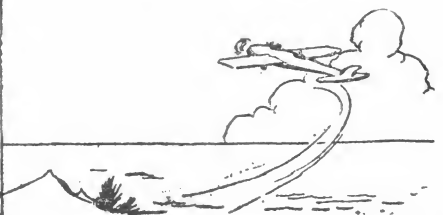
SHANE had tangled with Chiang-Kai-Shek again, and Madame Chiang, who liked Shane, was away, and therefore no longer able to make peace between the American and the peppery Generalissimo. Now Shane was virtually a prisoner in the compound of the United Mission at Hankow, with the Japs threatening to storm the city at any hour.

The Generalissimo's blood was up. He had rounded up fifty members of the peace party, including old Han Mow, a friend of Shane's, and it looked as if heads were due to roll.

The trouble had all been brought about by Burton, and Burton wasn't in any condition to explain, because he was taking the gravel cure — about four feet underground.

Burton had brought Shane to Hankow because Chiang-Kai-Shek wanted more chemists on his staff, and Shane had majored in chemistry at Wesleyan. Shane had the impression that Burton was booked for a big job. He tried him, drunk and sober, but, the tighter Burton got, the tighter he kept his mouth closed. "Just stick

The bomb landed so close that it flung Camille to the ground.



around, old man," was Burton's idea of a confidence. So Shane just stuck around, drew his pay, and waited to see what he was wanted for.

Burton, sober, was quiet and forceful, but Burton, drunk, had the weird idea that he was a born flyer, and he insisted on taking Shane joy-riding. He had cracked up two machines before that unhappy night when he insisted on taking Shane up again. A Jap plane came their way, and Burton, with three slugs in him, got back with the best landing he had ever made, and dropped dead at the feet of the Generalissimo. That was just Shane's hard luck.

Shane paced the compound, listening to the crash of the Japanese shells in the old town. He had a nasty hangover. He cursed the Generalissimo. He cursed himself. He cursed Burton. In the brightening dawn he could see figures swarming beneath the pall of smoke that hung over the town. It looked and sounded as if the city was being stormed, house by house.

THERE came a new outburst of pandemonium, the rattle of machine-guns close at hand. Up the hill toward the compound came a troop of Japanese soldiers, led by a dwarfish officer in the uniform of the flying corps. They came to a halt outside the locked gates of the Mission, and the officer yelled to the native pastor to open.

The pastor, who was trying to reassure his terrified charges, moved forward; he was an old

Chinese, and paralyzed with terror.

Shane hurried forward. "This is American property," he shouted.

"Oh yes, it is all right," grinned the little officer. "The General has sent me to protect you. My word of honor nobody shall be harmed here."

The pastor was already unlocking the gate. The Japanese surged into the compound. Instantly Shane was seized. Rifle muzzles were thrust against his body. Still grinning, the dwarfish officer raised his automatic and shot the pastor dead. And next instant the Japanese were in the midst of the refugees, massacring the men in rows, dragging the screaming women inside, and tearing off their garments.

"You lying devil! So that's your word of honor! The word of honor of a Samurai!" Shane raged.

"But you mistake," explained the officer. "My word of honor is for the laugh. I am not a Samurai. Just common stock. I think the General will see you now."

Shane was forced out of the compound and led through streets in which the dead were piled up in an obscene medley of limbs and torsos. The whole lower part of the city was a shambles, and through the dense smoke Shane caught glimpses of soldiers running into shops, hauling out Chinese, slashing their throats. Others, laden with plunder, staggered away. The screams of the women, the yells of the men rose in a frightful diapason to the murky skies.

In the courtyard of a public

building, old Han Mow, the head of the peace party, who had evidently escaped the Generalissimo's clutches, was standing amid a group of Japanese officers.

"How do you do, Mr. Burton?" he smiled benevolently. "I was afraid for you. I am glad you have come safely through this experience. You are the guest of the Japanese General. You must rest and have a good meal, and later we shall have a talk together."

Now why had old Han Mow, whom Shane knew intimately, addressed him as "Burton?"

WHEN Shane was conducted, later, into the room, the murderous little flying officer, and another, were seated with Han Mow, but the old man didn't introduce them.

"Well, we have both been fortunate, my dear Burton," said Han Mow. "I know the Generalissimo meant to have us both executed. He had a brain wave, in the absence of Madame Chiang. Fortunately I was released before he could carry out his plan as regards myself. So now we can proceed with our own measures. You have a general knowledge of the proposal?"

"Only slightly," said Shane, playing up to the old man, and wondering what was coming next.

"The trouble is that Indigo Island lies just outside the Japanese Mandate in the Pacific. Due to its proximity to the Philippines, it has not been thought advisable to take forcible possession of it.

"And yet it is essential that Mr. Li be prevented from ship-

ping his indigo to the Philippines. The payment for it is lying in a bank there, and the money would be used by our former friend, the Generalissimo, to pay for the supplies and munitions now piled up on the Burmese frontier, awaiting a cash settlement.

"As you know," Han Mow went on, "the vegetable indigo, which is so superior to the synthetic product, is cultivated hardly anywhere in the world except on Mr. Li's island. His last year's crop, together with the present crop, would pay for all the Generalissimo's war supplies. And that would mean a prolongation of hostilities. It is a veritable treasure, to which I understand Mr. Li is largely indifferent. A hermit, my dear friend Burton, enjoying the sunset of his days upon his island."

Han Mow leaned forward. "Your task, Mr. Burton, was to inspect and certify the product when it was delivered at Manila. You have agreed to work for the Patriotic Party instead, and inspect and certify the crop when it is delivered at a Japanese port instead of at Manila. Am I correct?"

"Oh, quite," said Shane, beginning to understand.

"Everything has been arranged. Your papers will prove to Mr. Li that you are Chiang's agent. Our own agents will be ready to take possession of the island at the proper moment. Captain Otaro here"—he glanced at the dwarfish officer—"will fly you to Hai-phong. There another pilot will meet you, and fly you to Indigo Island. The lady—"

"A woman pilot?"

"A very capable one. She is, I believe, Mr. Li's Number One wife, and she must not suspect the part you are playing, for Mr. Li trusts her implicitly, and she is his brains and his right hand. Mademoiselle Camille Davenant is the name she goes by. Well, how do you feel about it, Burton?"

"I've got to play a crooked game."

"Yes, my dear friend. War is crooked. We are all crooked. Even now our heads are sitting crookedly upon our shoulders." He broke into rapid Cantonese. "Don't be a fool," he said. "They have shot all the rest of the Generalissimo's advisers, who couldn't get away with him. They think you are Burton. I have his papers. I have been to great pains to save your life. You accept, of course?"

"Hell, yes," said Burton. "I'll be glad to take a crack at Chiang. Wanted my head, did he?"

"And nearly got it. Mr. Burton accepts the honorable proposition," said Han Mow to Captain Otaro.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Li's Paradise

WHEN Captain Otaro, the dwarfish officer, had deposited him at the Hai-phong field, Shane went to the Hotel Européen, where Mademoiselle Davenant was staying, and was shown up to her room.

The sight of her staggered Shane. He had expected to encounter an almond-eyed siren of at least half Chinese ancestry. But there seemed no trace of

Celestial blood in this dark-haired, dark-eyed French girl, in her early twenties, who smilingly gave Shane her hand.

That frock, which revealed the full curves of the form beneath it, must have come from Paris. The curves of her throat made Shane's heart beat faster. The V-shaped opening of the frock disclosed the upper curves of a bosom that, Shane felt, ought never to be concealed.

Mademoiselle Camille didn't ask to see Shane's papers. She took him for Burton readily enough. They talked about the war, and she asked him about the sack of Hankow. She became animated, vehement in her denunciations.

"It goes hard with poor China," she said. "But, if each of us does his best, China will win. The sale of Mr. Li's indigo, which he is presenting to Chaing-Kai-Shek out of patriotism and old friendship, will release for China munitions enough to guarantee her resistance for months. And I know you will do everything you can for us. I know that we can trust you."

They were standing together in the window embrasure. Camille turned and put her hands upon Shane's shoulders, looking into his face.

She was lovely, sweet, impassioned. Shane took her little hands in his, fighting back the impulse to take her in his arms. What could he answer? For the first time he felt ashamed of the deception that he was practising.

"We trust you, Mr. Burton, and we know that you will do every-

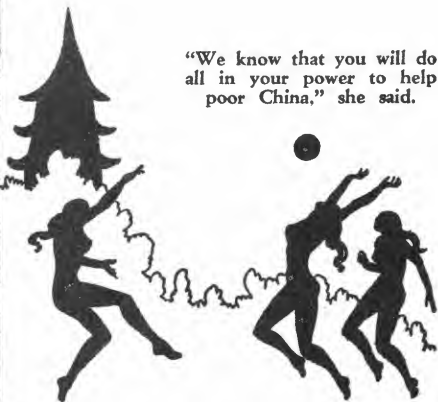


thing in your power to help poor China."

THE plane was an old war type, a three-seater, with the machine-gun beside the pilot, and synchronized mechanism. Camille looked quite competent to use it, too. They took off at earliest dawn, with the constellations slowly winding around the pole star, but growing dimmer in that opaque light spreading out of the east.

There would be no stop, no land until Indigo Island was sighted. Now it was beginning to grow light. The milky sea dissolved. Above the eastern horizon a blood-red sickle swung into view. Then suddenly it was day, and far underneath Shane saw the blue of the Pacific.

Through the hours, he watched Camille. Three or four times she turned to smile at him. Shane, already head over heels in love with her, brooded over the future. Camille's lovely head and shoulders, rising above the cockpit in front of him, seemed all that he



"We know that you will do all in your power to help poor China," she said.

wanted in the world. His mission had sunk into relative insignificance.

He munched sandwiches. Camille drank from a bottle of champagne and handed it to him. Shane put his lips to where her lips had been. "I'm making a fool of myself," he thought, and tried to harden himself. More time went by, and then Camille turned to point again.

Floating upon the blue Pacific, Shane saw a tiny island, swiftly growing larger. All around it was the white rim of surf-lashed sands. Hills rose in the interior, and the black became verdure.

They were losing altitude. Shane could distinguish long plantations, a checker-board of trees, a small wharf with a freighter moored to it, warehouses, with tiny figures bustling about them. A stretch of gardens, intersected by white paths leading up to an enormous, irregularly shapped bungalow. A little landing-field hard by—and, without a jar, the plane swooped to her landing.

FOUR figures awaited them, besides the Chinese mechanics. One was an immensely stout old Chinese, wearing a suit of yellow silk and a mandarin cap with a button, on his bald head. Another, a slender young Chinese, in white ducks. The two others were white men.

One of the pair, who seemed in his early thirties, had a scholarly face, with eyes of piercing blackness behind his convex lenses. He glanced at Shane with a detached, cynical look. The second, some ten

years older, wore a coat and trousers splashed with green stains. He looked tough, and Nature had evidently intended him to be tough when she gave him that bull-neck and barrel of a torso. There was a scowl on his red, sweat-beaded face.

"I am Li," said the old man, giving Shane his hand. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Burton. These are my assistants—Professor Hewlett, of Harvard, and Mr. Barron, my overseer, also from your own country."

"Oh, say the Bronx, and he'll place me," said the tough Barron, extending a ham-like hand. That hand was a dynamometer. Its grip hurt, and it was meant to hurt. Barron's leer changed to a wince as Shane put his own strength into his grip.

"And this," said Li, indicating the second Chinese, "is my secretary and—shall I say *liaison* officer?—Mr. Fang. He will be at your disposal, Mr. Burton, and will do everything in his power to make you comfortable.

"You must have a good rest after your flight, and we shall meet at dinner."

WHEN Shane awoke, after a comfortable sleep, in his room on the second story, he found that a suit of whites and a complete outfit of clothing had been brought in and laid down on a chair. Through the windows he could see the gardens, odoriferous and aflame with color. A gentle breeze was blowing. The plangent sound of the waves was audible; the wharf and godowns looked deserted.

He dressed and went downstairs. The long living-room was cool and dark. A Chinese boy was handing a drink to Hewlett, who was lolling back on a couch. On another couch Barron was stretched out, with a rum *stenga* beside him.

"Hello, here's Burton," he called thickly. "Boy, bring Mr. Burton a drink. How about you, Hewlett? 'One-drink' Hewlett, huh? You ought to be in a museum, old fellow. So you hopped out of Hankow before the Japs got in. Burton? Turn on the radio, Hewlett; let's hear the baseball."

Hewlett ignored him. Shane took his drink and drained the glass. Then old Li appeared in the doorway between the living-room and one behind it. He was wearing a white silk Chinese coat and skirt. Beside him stood Camille in an evening frock that daringly revealed the rounded curves of her. Behind were two short, stocky Orientals, one in whites, the other in a blue military uniform.

"Good-evening, gentlemen. Mr. Burton, let me present you. Captain Machado, who commands my little garrison, and Captain Foo, who has charge of my freighter."

"Shall we go in to dinner?" asked Camille. Her eyes were raised to Shane's with an appraising look. Did she suspect him, after all? Shane guessed that old Han Mow hadn't been far wrong when he called her Li's brains and right hand. He took his seat at the table, and let his eyes rove from Li, at the head, over the faces of the four men.

Barron was drinking heavily and feeding grossly. Hewlett, poised and silent, was pecking shortsightedly at his food. Foo and Machado ate stolidly and in silence. Foo was wholly Chinese, but Machado looked like a Portuguese half-breed, probably from Macao.

And through the almost silent meal Shane was conscious of the play and interplay of thoughts and wills.

When they rose, Li ushered him into a room to one side of the dining-room. It was Chinese in its furnishings, and lined with books and Chinese scrolls. Li gestured Shane to a chair.

"I am glad you have come," he said.

"You would like to see my credentials, Mr. Li?"

"It is not necessary. I trust the judgment of my friend, Chiang-Kai-Shek, one of the greatest men in the world. How do you like my island paradise? Do you think you can endure it for a week or two, until my crop is ready for shipment?"

"I don't think that will be difficult, sir," said Shane.

Li seemed to brood, his wise old head drooping upon his breast. Then he raised it. He looked very old.

"I like you, Mr. Burton," he said. "Seventy years of life have given me a certain judgment of character. I hope to enjoy your companionship. And I hope you will like it here. To spend one's last years in this little paradise, where we are all friends, seems to me the perfect harmony."

He spoke a little more, and



bowed Shane out. For the second time Shane felt ashamed of his deception.

THE living-room was empty when he went out. Shane didn't feel like going to bed. He strolled out into the gardens, the scent of whose flowers came fragrantly on the night breeze. Beyond them lay the *godowns*, the warehouses, with the freighter moored beside them, a black hulk in the moonlight. Beyond all the sea, splashed ceaselessly upon the coral shingle.

Nobody seemed stirring. Shane walked along the front of the bungalow, rounded the corner,

and saw a long, low extension, the windows dimly lit and curtained. Suddenly a woman's voice whispered to him from a dark window.

Shane stopped. Camille had been in his thoughts. But the girl had whispered in English, and her invitation didn't seem to be that of a courtesan.

"Help us, American!"

An unseen door clicked open. Shane stepped inside. He heard the melodious laughter of girls from a room behind a curtain. But a girl barred the way. "Not

Swinging the rifle, he lunged
at the two men.



in there," she whispered. "I must speak to you."

Shane had already raised the curtain. One by one, soft little lamps of varying colors sprang into light. He heard squeals of laughter. He perceived that he was in a huge court. Flowers bloomed beside tinkling fountains, and, in a space paved with alternate blocks of white and pink coral, a bevy of young Chinese girls were playing ball.

There were about eight of them, and they wore nothing but sheer silk shorts. White, softly rounded breasts, white arms gleamed in the lamplight. The girl at Shane's side had slipped away.

Shane stood stock-still, amazed. What were these girls, who came

running toward him, with neither invitation nor coquetry, but simply as children.

They flocked about him, tugging at his arms. "American man, tell us how goes the war," lisped one of them.

They drew him into the court and imprisoned him with their strong young arms. One of them brought a silver cup brimming with wine.

"Tell us about the war, American man."

They sprang away with little twitters as soft footsteps sounded. Shane saw Fang, the young Chinese secretary.

"No, Mr. Burton, it is not permitted," he said. "I must ask you to leave."

SHANE got up, shrugging his shoulders, and went back into the gardens. At the entrance of the bungalow he stopped for a moment, trying to orientate himself. He took the corridor that he thought led to the stairs. But there were no stairs. Where he thought they should have been, he saw Camille and Hewlett, standing in a recess. They were close together, talking earnestly, and the girl's fingers were on Hewlett's coat lapel.

Old Li's Number One wife and Hewlett! A spasm of jealous anger and disgust ran through Shane. He turned away, groped along another corridor, and a figure moved toward him out of a recess. It was a Chinese servant in a uniform of brown; the man was smiling, but he held an automatic in his hand. He gestured Shane back.

Suddenly Shane saw the stairs a short distance away, at the end of a little passage. He went up to his own room, and sat down pondering.

There was a light tap at the door. Shane opened it, to see Camille standing there. She glided in softly. She put her hands upon Shane's shoulders as she had done in the hotel at Hai-phong, and the warmth and perfume of her made Shane giddy. Besides, there was no longer any cause for restraint. He had seen enough downstairs. So he took her in his arms, and felt her supple bosom throbbing hard against him.

He tilted back her head and pressed his lips to hers. For an instant they were cold and unresponsive. Then it was as if warmth

flooded them. Her lips answered Shane's; Camille stood limp in his arms for a moment, breathing heavily, her eyes half-closed.

Shane's hands were fumbling at her shoulder-strap. A flap of the garment fell, revealing one rounded breast. But suddenly Camille struggled out of his grasp, pushed him away.

"Not yet!" she whispered.

"When?" asked Shane hoarsely.

"When the indigo is aboard. I shall tell you. You must trust me."

Alone, Shane stood looking out across the scented gardens. Who were his fellow-conspirators? Was Camille one of them? And the girls in the annex? It was all mystifying. They might be old Li's mistresses, and yet they had seemed like children, unashamed of their nudity, not understanding.

THERE was only Hewlett at breakfast when Shane went down. He was finishing an omelette, and he glanced up in his mocking way at Shane's greeting. While Shane ate the quite American breakfast that the China boy brought him, Hewlett smoked one cigarette after another.

"Of course, Burton, being a chemist, you are quite familiar with the process of extracting indigo?" he asked.

"I understand the principle."

"Nothing like seeing it in practice. Shall we go down to the shop?"

Shane accompanied Hewlett through the gardens. Through the open doorway of one of the godowns, he could see two elderly

Chinese, seated at high desks on old-fashioned high stools, bending over their ledgers. Laborers were carrying great baskets, filled with the freshly cut plants, into an end shed. But these laborers were not Chinese. They were dwarfish brown-skinned aborigines, with animal physiognomies, wearing nothing but loin-cloths over their emaciated bodies, their bellies swollen, their bare feet padding soundlessly on the road of crushed coral. Chinese overseers hastened them, cracking whips.

Inside the end shed the plants were soaking in huge vats, connected by pipes.

"Here," said Hewlett — "well, what should you say we are doing here?"

Shane, who had studied a textbook on the flight from Hankow, answered, "Converting the chemical constituents into glucose and indoxyl."

Hewlett cast an amused glance at him. "And here?" he asked, at the entrance to the next shed, where a monstrous paddle-wheel was whipping the surface of a sunken tank into a scummy froth.

"Oxydizing the indoxyl."

"You've learned your lesson well, Burton. Really, your assistance will be most valuable to me," said Hewlett sardonically.

In the next shed the deposit that had been drawn off was being pressed into moulds, and the damp bricks were passing on an endless carrier into a sun-drenched yard beyond.

"Ready to start?" leered Hewlett.

"I'll start with the plantation, I think."

"Now that's an excellent idea." Hewlett pointed up the road. "Keep straight ahead. You can't miss it."

THERE must have been a thousand acres under cultivation. The furrows, perfectly aligned, ran toward the uplands. All along them, lines of natives were busy with their hoes. In the distance Shane recognized Barron's stocky figure.

When Shane came nearer, he could hear Barron shouting, and see him brandishing his whip. Shane was about fifty yards away when the overseer broke into a storm of abuse, and Shane saw him bring the lash curling about the back of one of the loin-clad laborers, who cowered under it, screaming in a shrill voice.

Shane wouldn't have lost his self-control, perhaps, if he hadn't discovered, as he hurried up, that all these laborers were women.

Barron, plying his whip, swung about at Shane's angry shout, a sadistic leer upon his bloated features. Shane leaped at the big man, who raised his whip threateningly.

Shane swung to Barron's jaw, connecting with a crack that sent Barron reeling. "You damn' swine!" Shane roared.

Barron dropped the whip, and came back with flailing fists. Any of his blows, connecting fairly, would have put Shane to sleep. But it was clear in a moment that Barron couldn't box, and Shane let him exhaust himself dealing terrific blows in air, until he had the big man at his mercy. Then a strong right drive to the chin

dropped Barron like a felled tree.

Shane, standing over him, saw the scared faces of the brown women, with their pendulous breasts and bony ribs — then Li and Fang, who had come up during the altercation. Li spoke to Fang in high-pitched Mandarin, and Fang translated:

"Mr. Li says he is not pleased with you, Mr. Burton. He does not permit violence upon his island."

"Violence? Did you see Barron flogging this girl? Look at her!" cried Shane, pointing to the cowering bush-woman.

Li's features relaxed in a benignant smile. "Ah, my dear friend —" the old man began.

"You spoke to me last night about a little paradise of perfect harmony."

Li smiled as at a fractious child. "But I referred to civilized man, of course," he answered. "For the enjoyment of the full fruit of happiness, naturally there must be the lower races to minister to our needs."

Shane, still glowering, wondered whether Li's indignation might not have another origin. It was certainly probable in the extreme that Fang had told him of his intrusion into the harem the night before.

HEWLETT, seated on the edge of the laboratory table, listened and drummed his fingers. Shane had recounted the episode in the hope of drawing him out.

"So you licked Barron. You seem to be a man of unexpected prowess, Burton. But I'm afraid you've started in wrong, antagonizing Barron and old Li. Flogged one of the nigger wenches, did he? Probably one of



his women, and I'll bet she loved it.

"However, don't let Barron get on your mind. He's a dumb ox. He's not likely to trouble you any more, but I'd advise you not to talk too much in his presence. The trouble is about Li. I should think you'd realize it's important not to antagonize old Li.

"By the way, I suppose Li told you about your ten thousand dollars?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"No? Well, there will be a bonus of ten thousand dollars American coming to you as soon as the indigo has been certified and

It was Barron who
headed the charge as the
door sagged.



passed. Don't think I'm asking you to violate your conscience, Burton. The product isn't being adulterated. We don't play tricks like that—no need to. That's just a sweetener.

"Yes, Burton, ten thousand bonus for you as soon as your job's completed, and we ought to sail within two weeks. And you're a pretty slick worker, Burton; I've got to hand you that."

Hewlett went out chuckling. Following slowly, Shane had no doubt that Hewlett and Shane were the "agents" of whom Han Mow had spoken. But Hewlett had chosen to deal in hints, rather than come out in the open, and there was nothing for Shane to do but wait until he declared himself.

CHAPTER III

The Storm Breaks

BARRON came to Shane surlily next day. "Well, Burton, you whipped me," he acknowledged. "If I was ten years younger, you couldn't have done it. I sized you up for a weak sister. Well, I was wrong."

He held out his hand, and Shane took it. There was no more trouble with Barron. But neither he nor Hewlett approached Shane with proposals. There was nothing to do but wait. And, as the days passed, Shane began to wonder whether, at the last moment, he wouldn't change sides and fight for Li.

He liked the old man, and Li seemed to have forgotten the little trouble with Barron. But Camille was the chief cause of Shane's

change of attitude. Shane had thought it would be a fine thing to hit at the Generalissimo, but China was very far away, and Camille was daily before Shane's eyes.

Shane avoided her, but no more than she avoided him. He was torn between jealousy and desire. It was obvious how Hewlett's eyes followed the girl. It was amazing that old Li appeared unconscious of it. Was she Hewlett's mistress? Where did they meet? Once Shane and Camille had come face to face unexpectedly, in a secluded corner of the gardens. Instinctively their hands had gone out and clung. But Shane couldn't read that inscrutable look on Camille's face. He knew only that she was his for the taking.

When? As if in answer to his question, she seemed to say again, "Wait till the indigo is aboard!" But had she said that in reality, or was the message telepathically conveyed? Shane watched her hurry away along the coral path, watched her as one who might already have possessed her—the lissom curves of her, the length of limb beneath the short skirt, the slender ankles and the tiny feet.

He couldn't wait much longer. Meanwhile he inspected the indigo, taking samples in the shops, examined it aboard the freighter, and talked with Captain Foo. But it was impossible to discover whether Foo was one of the conspirators, or if his half-dozen moon-faced Chinese sailors knew anything. The only interesting fact that Shane ascertained was that there was a three-inch gun

under the tarpaulin at the stern of the freighter.

There was an atmosphere of brooding mystery over the island, and Shane waited daily for the storm to break.

IT WAS about a week after his altercation with Barron that he awoke one night with a start. Thunder was muttering in the distance, but that wasn't what had awakened him. It was the figure gliding into his room.

Shane reached under his pillow for his gun—but the next instant he saw that the figure was a woman. His heart leaped suddenly. Camille! He wasn't going to let her go—this time.

But then he saw it wasn't Camille. It was one of the little Chinese girls. Shane couldn't imagine how she had gained admittance to his room, but he had guessed that there were concealed passages in the bungalow, whose inner rooms were still a mystery to him.

She was wearing a single garment of white silk, that came a little below the knees, showing the slim legs and sandaled feet. Beneath the sheer, close-fitting texture, Shane could see the outlines of the firm breasts, and the slender waist.

She kneeled beside Shane and put her cheek against his. "You must help us, American man," she reiterated, over and over.

"What do you want me to do?" Shane was bewildered. His blood was stirred by her proximity, despite Camille, by the youthful, vital vibrance of her. Who was she? Was this a trap or a test?

"Come with me!"

"Where?"

"I shall show you."

"Who sent you? Mademoiselle Camille?"

"I do not know who you mean," she answered, to Shane's astonishment: "You must come! If you do not come, there is death for many, and for us—" She shivered.

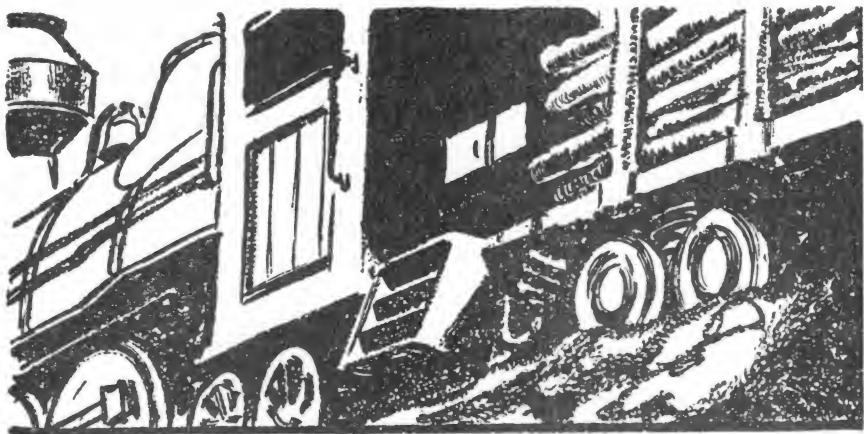
Shane still suspected some trap, but now curiosity was paramount. "Wait outside for a minute," he said. He dressed, thrust his automatic into his pocket, and went outside. The girl was crouching, waiting for him. Shane remembered afterward that the silence within the bungalow was like the silence outside, as Nature waited for the breaking of the thunder-storm.

THERE was a hidden door, as Shane had suspected, and he had passed that wall a score of times without suspecting its existence. A narrow corridor, another door, and Shane was standing in a passage-way between the extension and the aloe hedge that bounded the gardens. The girl had disappeared.

A trap? Standing immobile, Shane saw the glowing tip of a cigarette close by him. Slowly there came into the field of vision two men, and Shane recognized Hewlett and the stocky Captain Machado. Shortly, without a word, Machado detached himself and disappeared behind the hedge.

From another direction sounded the clatter of horsehoofs on the coral road. Shane recognized Camille as she rode by, and

(Continued on page 82)



TROPIC TALISMAN

BRICK CHURCHILL'S heart pounded when he saw the feminine prisoner being conducted toward him. He had a crazy impulse to leap from the desk at which he sat, the desk that was his badge of totalitarian authority in the district, and to call out a greeting.

Instead, he remained impassive. It cost him a mighty effort, but he succeeded. To display recognition would spell death for the girl who faced him—and for himself as well.

So he sat rigidly quiet. He told himself he must forget that he was a U. S. Naval Intelligence officer. For the present he was a

captain of Nazis, sitting in judgment on an enemy.

And the enemy was Diana Rand, the girl he loved!

Slender and auburn-haired and dainty in crisp white linen that limned her contours like a starched caress, she stood very poised and cool in that steamy room of corrugated metal near the Guadalombian seacoast, where banana-tainted heat was a visible presence as menacing as the thick-chested blond men who surrounded her. Despite the almost unbearable Torrid Zone swelter of late afternoon and the dark glowers of her captors, she seemed unmoved and unafraid. Her regal

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM



With Diana in his embrace,
he plunged into the night.

*Much as he loved the girl,
Churchill's first allegiance
was to his country. But even
as he handed her over to Nazi
indignities, he swore his ven-
geance would be terrible*

indifference to danger held a hint of contempt.

A bullnecked Gestapo sergeant, brown-shirted, his pate shaven to sweaty shine, roughly shoved her closer to the desk where Brick Churchill sat. "This is the woman, *Herr Oberst.*"

Brick nodded, "*Sehr gut, Heinboch.*" His eyes were twin splinters of ice, expressionless as window panes, when he looked at his fiancée. "Your name?" he demanded. As if he didn't know!

"Diana Rand. American citizen." Her voice was lilting, like a springtime brook. "I want to know by what right you took me off that fruit train as if I were a criminal."

"There is no need to discuss rights in the face of an accomplished fact," Brick retorted gutturally.

Her steady gaze measured him. "You know, I'd heard of German infiltration in these Central American republics. But I wouldn't have believed the extent of it if I weren't seeing it with my own eyes. So you and your Nazis are running things your own way down here in Guadalupe, eh?"

"We run things our own way on the banana plantations we happen to control, *Fraulein.*" Brick's Teutonic accent was impeccable.

"And do you trademark your fruit with swastikas?"

Heinboch, the bullnecked sergeant, caught her arm and twisted it. "Enough of your *verdammte* Yankee insolence!"

CHURCHILL struggled against a desire to lunge at the fellow and slug him senseless. He

didn't dare. Nor was it necessary. Diana, with her free hand, slapped Heinboch across the mouth. "Get your dirty paws off me."

The sergeant's throat swelled with an oath. Then, before he could again grab the girl, he was brought to a halt by Churchill's knife-sharp: "*Achtung! Attention!*"

Heinboch saluted reluctantly. "*Ja, Oberst?*" A thin thread of blood trickled from his lower lip and he quivered like a hound on tight leash.

"Don't touch the prisoner again unless I order it!" Churchill snapped. "You will remember that I am in command here, even though I arrived but recently!"

"Yes, *Oberst.*" Heinboch's square face turned a sullen crimson and he rejoined his three brown-shirted comrades at the far end of the warehouse, muttering something to them.

Churchill wondered if he had gone too far by interrupting the sergeant's brutality. It wouldn't do to show any softness at this stage of the dangerous game which he and Diana Rand were playing. To fit his role he must seem callous, merciless.

He stared frigidly at the auburn-haired girl. "We've learned that an operative from Washington has been busy in this region, investigating the domestic Guadalupean political situation; meddling in affairs which are of no concern to the United States."

Diana drawled: "Strikes me it is a concern of Washington when a secret jungle air-base is being built within four hours bomber-flight of the Panama Canal."

"So!" Churchill came out of his chair. "You must be the one we want! How else would you know—?"

For the first time, Diana looked uneasy. "Even tourists hear rumors," she defended herself. Her dainty breasts rose and fell.

"But you are no tourist, *Fraulein*. Tourists do not snap forbidden photographs and then conceal their cameras." Churchill turned to Heinboch. "You searched her luggage?"

"Thoroughly, *Oberst*. Soon as we took her from the train."

"You found nothing?"

"Nothing, *Oberst*."

Churchill stared at his fiancée. "Then the camera must still be on your person. Strip."

"Wh-what?"

"You heard me. Remove your clothing."

Her chin tilted defiance at him. "I won't!"

"Would you prefer that I do it for you?"

His tone seemed to frighten her. "I—all r-right. B-but you'll answer for this!" Blushing, keeping her back turned to Heinboch and the other three brown-shirts, she began to unfasten the snaps of her linen costume.

In roseate embarrassment she raised the hem of her starched skirt. Her legs were slim, chiffon-seathed symmetries melting into dimpled knees and creamy white thighs. Slowly she brought the dress over her auburn curls, where it seemed to stick for an instant. Then she whisked out of it, tossed it aside and posed wittily before the desk like an enticing goddess.

Her figure was a sculptor's dream of perfection, alluringly enhanced by fragile silk step-ins and a wisp of brassiere that contoured the rising glories of her breasts, new-pink and superbly nubile. The sight of her almost-nude body sent tingling thrills through Brick Churchill's veins, and he damned the need that had forced her to disrobe before Heinboch and the other three. They were visually feasting on her disclosed charms; optically fondling her sleek hips, her proud bosom....

SHE shrugged a bare shoulder at Churchill. "D'you think I could hide a camera in an outfit like this?"

"No, *Fraulein*. But your dress, which gave you so much trouble when you took it off—that is another matter." He picked up the linen frock and shook a Leica from its folds. "You see?"

"Give me that!"

"*Nein*. Not until I have developed the film." Churchill barked an order to Heinboch and his fellows. "Take her to Cabin One while I go to my darkroom."

They seized the girl and hustled her from the warehouse without giving her a chance to salvage her dress. She seemed too stunned to resist, even when their hands touched her with unnecessary intimacy.

Churchill held himself in strict check, realizing the folly of interference. Then, presently, he strode into the swiftly-falling dusk; crossed the plantation compounded to his own shack of palmetto thatch. All about him was

tropic heat, the sweetish stink of overripe fruit, the droning of insects — and the ever-present hover of death if his true status should be discovered by his Nazi underlings.

Nearby, native peons labored at loading stalks of green bananas into a narrow guage train for shipment to the harbor, fourteen miles distant. Churchill knew these peons hated him, for he had gone out of his way to be harsh with them—in keeping with the role he was playing. He could not depend on them for help if anything went wrong, he knew. Therefore he must not permit anything to go wrong. Not with victory so near at hand . . . !

HE ENTERED his house—and froze as he heard someone coming toward him from the inner gloom. Then he relaxed. "Oh, it's you, Lolita," he murmured to the approaching native girl.

Her skin was golden-tawny, betraying the touch of white blood in her peon ancestry; her single garment of thin cotton print clung damply to her lush curves, delineating the sway of her hips and the generous mounds of her breasts. When she smiled, her lips were ripe blossoms of invitation. "Thy evening meal is prepared, master," she purred. "Thy house is cleaned and thy bed made, as you asked."

"Good. You can go."

She came closer, breathing hard in the deepening shadows. "When the other *Oberst* lived here, the one whose place you took, he did not send Lolita away."

He felt ill at ease, knowing

what she expected of him; knowing the habits of his predecessors. This was his one failure on the present job, the one flaw in an otherwise perfect impersonation. A true Nazi would not have sent the tawny Lolita away. Such alliances were so commonplace that a deviation became all the more noticeable, perhaps to the extent that it would arouse suspicion.

Yet Churchill had been unable to accept the condition. Not that Lolita was unattractive. On the contrary, her nearness made his body go hot; he was both human and masculine, and this peon girl radiated love-lure.

On more than one night he had tossed restlessly on his bed after sending her away, fitfully damning his own strict code of honor. Then he would calm himself by thinking of Diana Rand, the girl he really cared for; the girl who was his partner in this present hazardous counter-espionage enterprise. Remembering Diana's succulent lips, recalling the sweet yield of her body in his embrace, would lull and soothe him and make him forget the more pagan wiles of the peon woman.

He smiled now at Lolita, pretending not to notice her tawny beauty or the offered temptation of her smile. "Run along," he said gently. "I've work to do in the darkroom."

"All work can wait . . . for this." She slid her arms around his neck, welded her voluptuous figure against him. The pressure of her breasts sent spates of sensation through him; for an instant he held her responsively, with an ardor that flattened those cush-



iony mounds until her dress threatened to split open.

Then he thought of Diana, and pushed the tawny girl away—more roughly than he had intended. She stumbled and almost fell. A sudden flame glowed cat-like in her eyes as she steadied herself. "So Lolita is not good enough for you?"

"It's not that. I simply have work to do." He went into the closet-sized cubicle which had been equipped with photographic apparatus by some previous occupant.

BUT he didn't take Diana's camera from his pocket. Instead, he waited until he heard Lolita leaving the house; then he emerged into the night that had draped its purple cloak over the compound. Draped in shadow, he moved stealthily across the

"Take her to Cabin One and hold her," he barked.

clearing to Cabin One, where Diana Rand had been locked up.

With a master key he opened the door. He stepped inside. "Diana, honey!" he whispered.

"Oh-h-h, Brick! Brick . . . darling!" She came into his arms.

To Churchill, it was like soaring from peril to Paradise. He had no need to see in the room's darkness; he knew Diana's eyes were shining and he sensed the sweet fervor that impelled her to hold up her mouth for his thirsty kiss. Searching, he found the sultry goal of her lips and drank deeply of their nectar.

"Diana . . ." he panted.

She was a fragrant flame igniting him; and she was the lake of feminine mystery that could quench his fiery yearnings. Throbbing hillocks were resilient upon his hard body; hillocks of dainty flesh lacily imprisoned in the cups of the wispy brassiere.

He bent her backward; lowered her gently. His embrace engulfed her, and for a brief moment he knew the full meaning of ecstasy in the midst of hazard. . . .

PRESENTLY, when sanity had returned to them both, Churchill whispered: "Tell me, beloved. Did you snap all the shots I wanted?"

"Yes. By following your instructions I found the air-base you told me they were building. I got telephoto pictures of the entire layout. Oh, Brick, darling, it's so terribly elaborate! Especially that hangar dug under the hill where the narrow gauge railroad runs along a curving trestle! After it's

camouflaged, nobody would ever be able to spot it!"

He clenched his fists. "Yes. And that hangar-cave is full of airplane parts shipped in as agricultural machinery and waiting to be assembled. That's why our work is so important, Diana. This thing must be nipped by the Guadalmobian authorities as soon as we can send our findings through the Washington diplomatic channels. Guadalmobia is friendly to the United States, but they don't know what's going on in this region; won't know until we get the information through."

Diana whispered: "Brick, why didn't you take the pictures yourself instead of assigning the job to me? And then why did you have me captured?"

"If I had made the snaps it might have aroused Sergeant Heinboch's suspicions, and he's a dangerous man. He hates my guts anyhow. He thinks he should have been promoted to command of this district when the last *Oberst* was transferred."

"You d-dont think he's wise to you?"

"No, he hasn't guessed that I'm an imposter. But he might have, if I'd taken pictures of the air-base. As for having you captured—well, one of Heinboch's men spotted you and reported. I was forced to call for a showdown. Besides, I wanted to contact you."

"Why?" Her arms wound around him again and her lips brushed his mouth. "For . . . this?"

He stole another moment of rapture. Then: "Yes. I wanted . . . everything you had to give me.

But there was another reason, too. I've got a lot of dope: names and locations of Nazi agents all over Guadalombia, and what their activities are. But I had no way of transmitting the material without the chance of running into trouble."

"So—?"

"So you'll take the report with you when you escape."

He felt the outward surge of her enchanting breasts as she drew a startled gasp. "You mean you're staying here? You're not going with me?" Then she stiffened, and her whisper was sharp with alarm. "Listen! What was that noise outside?"

Churchill heard nothing. "Probably leaves rustling. You mustn't let your nerves get frayed now, my sweet. And you mustn't worry on my account. After you've escaped, Heinboch will probably report me to Berlin for inefficiency and I'll be officially transferred. Then I'll be able to slip away in complete safety."

"Brick . . . I'm scared for you. For us both."

"Nonsense!" he touched her reassuringly, caressingly. "Now for the information you're to take with you. Ready?" And he began droning data in a steady monotone, knowing that each syllable was being engraved on Diana's memory just as it was etched in his own. When he finished, she repeated every word flawlessly, like a phonograph record.

Churchill chuckled: "Good. Now for your getaway." He led her to the door; opened it. They stepped out into the night—

FOUR brown-shirts faced them with drawn Lugers. It was Sergeant Heinboch who snarled: "Halt, swine! You are my prisoners!" Then a sword of flashlight-glare stabbed Brick Churchill's eyes.

Impotent fury filled him as he grew accustomed to the light and saw that the Nazis were accompanied by a tawny peon girl—his own half-caste housekeeper, Lolita! She pointed a vengeful finger at him. "He and his red-haired woman are *Yanqui* agents! I heard him making love to her, giving her information, planning her escape!"

Churchill damned himself, then, for having made an enemy of Lolita; for refusing the gifts she'd offered him. And he damned himself for paying no heed to the sound that Diana Rand had heard; the sound he'd thought to be leaves rustling. . . .

But which, instead, had been Lolita eavesdropping!

Heinboch stepped forward; relieved him of his holstered gun. "*Schwein!*" he grunted; and he maced Churchill over the skull with the weapon's muzzle.

The American intelligence officer toppled into an explosive chaos of pain. This, he told himself, was death. This was the end of all his work.

But he wasn't dead. Nor was he slugged again. Instead, they bound his wrists and dragged him into the warehouse; dumped him to the floor. Blurrily, in the lantern-lighted structure of corrugated metal, he saw Diana Rand being lifted to the desk and

pinioned there by three grinning brown-shirts.

Heinboch's leer held evil satisfaction. "Now, dog, you will see what happens to Germany's enemies. You will die, yes; but first you will suffer. You, by watching what happens to your woman. She, by paying certain penalties. . . ." There was no mistaking the sergeant's meaning.

"No! You can't do that to Diana!" Churchill yelled. "Damn you to hell—"

It was futile. Heinboch joined his three fellows at the far end of the warehouse. All four of them leaned over the auburn-haired American girl, mauling her, plucking at her gossamer brassiere. She struggled, her lilt-ing white body twisting and contorting, but her captors held her down. Cruel hands choked off her cries; bestial kisses defiled her lips.

Brick Churchill fought his bonds until his wrists bled raw. No use. The ropes were tied too well. He sobbed and closed his eyes, unable to watch what was happening to his sweetheart. Even without looking, he knew. He could tell by her whimpering moans. . . .

THEN, abruptly, he felt cold steel against his fingers. He quirmed in the shadows. "*Lolita!*"

The half-caste girl slashed again. He felt his fetters dropping away; flexed his freed wrists as Lolita whispered: "Come! We will escape while they are intent on the red-haired one. Let them have her. I will be thy woman.

I could not endure the thought of thy death—"

Churchill wasn't listening. Already he had snatched Lolita's knife and leaped to his feet. Now, like a thunderbolt of destruction, he hurled himself down the room at the four brown-shirts clustered around the desk on which Diana lay helpless. "You fiends!"

Startled, the Germans pivoted. The nearest one went for his Luger. It stuck. Churchill's fist drove home to the fellow's jaw, then darted for the partially-unholstered automatic. But it was still stuck.

That gave the remaining brown-shirts a chance to snap out of their daze. Heinboch's gun leaped into his fist. He took aim.

Lolita spoiled his shot. She threw an empty box, knocked the weapon aside. Heinboch's mis-directed bullet smashed the lantern overhead. Glass tinkled and solid blackness settled in the warehouse. Random gunthunder reverberated like drums of doom as flame-tongues licked from pistol muzzles, seeking Brick Churchill.

The American was zig-zagging. He gained the desk, tugged at his sweetheart. She fell into his arms, a shuddering bundle of semi-nudity. "Brick . . . !"

"Quiet!" he whispered. "If they hear us moving they'll get us!" He led her toward the rear door.

It was a cat-and-mouse game now. The Nazis fanned out, hunting their prey. Then came Heinboch's snarl: "Never mind the Americans. They cannot escape far. Kill the peon wench, Lolita! It was she who released that Yankee dog! Kill her and we will tell

He pushed her away, and
she stumbled and fell.



the laborers she was murdered
by the Americans. Then those
natives will go wild. They will
hunt down our enemies for us—
and lynch them!"

Churchill clenched his teeth.
That Nazi sergeant was smart.
Murderously smart. If Lolita died

and the peons were aroused, the
whole damned jungle would seem
with vengeance-seekers armed

with machetes. Churchill and Diana wouldn't stand a chance. . . .

"Here's the door!" he panted suddenly as he gripped Diana's fingers. "We'll run for it. Crouch low. Don't move in a straight line. And for God's sake hang onto my hand so I won't lose you!" Then he launched himself into the night, with the auburn-haired girl pelting at his side like a slender tropical goddess.

Together they arrowed across the plantation clearing. The Nazis erupted from the warehouse; spotted them. Gunfire raged and bullets slugged through the darkness.

Then, curiously, another automatic began to chatter from an angle. Those shots were aimed at the brown-shirts, sending them scattering for cover. Who could be coming to the rescue of Churchill and Diana at this unexpected moment?

A tawny, graceful figure appeared from the shadows. "Lolita!" Churchill gasped.

She joined him as he ran. "I got the gun from the man you struck with your fist, master."

He had no time to voice his approval. Dead ahead lay his goal: the fruit train which the peon laborers had been loading in the earlier dusk. The one avenue of possible escape. Churchill drove more speed into his legs, hoping against hope that he would find steam up in the ancient narrow gauge wood-burning locomotive. His heart hammered when he saw vague white plumes issuing from the engine's poppets. "Diana—Lolita—get in the cab and start

chucking wood into the fire-box!" he roared.

The two girls—one white, one brown, but both united in a sisterhood of jeopardy—obeyed his command. Churchill himself raced around between the tender and the first banana car; yanked out the old fashioned coupling pin which connected engine to train. Then he scrambled up into the locomotive cab; horsed the ancient Johnson bar forward on its notched trident and slammed the throttle wide open.

DRIVING wheels clattered. Sparks showered from the grind of iron tires against rusty rails. Churchill thumped the sander as his locomotive shuddered into reluctant motion. The sand gave his drivers purchase. Like an unleashed monster the wood-burner belched smoke and flame from its mushroom stack; plunged toward the jungle.

Back in the distance, gun-yammer volleyed. Churchill swept Diana Rand into his arms; crouched over her as soft-nosed slugs bashed into the cab. Glass shattered and a tongue of live steam licked at his shoulder, hellishly.

That was the pressure gauge. A bullet had smashed it. He pushed his bare left hand into that inferno of steam; found the stopcock and closed off the leak. Now there was no way to tell how much pressure there was in the boiler—but it didn't matter. Speed was what counted. Speed and more speed!

He released Diana and swayed past her to where the tawny Loli-

ta was piling chunks of wood into the blazing grate. "I'll fire for a while. It's no job for a woman."

"Lolita will do it. You go back to the controls!" There was something paganly magnificent about the peon girl as she spoke. Glare from the open fire-door bathed her in crimson, stressing the lush curves of her hips and breasts under the damp cling of her dress. "Go back to your controls—and to the one you love!" It was her way of relinquishing all claim to him. Then she began jamming more fuel under the boiler.

Churchill returned to Diana. Her lips framed a question. "Will we make it, Brick?"

"I don't know. Look back." Far to the rear, a headlight cut the darkness, baleful as the glare of a Cyclops. "Our plantation Diesel-electric car. Fastest thing in the district. Heinboch and his cut-throats are after us! We'll try to outrun them, but—"

But! So much hinged on the word! That Diesel car had power and it was balanced to stay on the rails at top speed, whereas this cluffing antique wood-burner was jumping crazily. The roadbed's slight upgrade was a safety factor now, but in a moment there would be a downhill stretch toward that curving trestle spanning Camino Gorge like a flimsy wooden spiderweb—Camino Gorge, where the Nazis had burrowed their underground airplane hangar. To hit that trestle curve at high speed would spell disaster.

But it had to be risked. The Diesel car was gaining. Churchill poured more steam into clattering

cylinders; sent his locomotive plunging up the rise. Up—and over—and now downgrade; The rails, twin streaks of narrow rust in engulfing jungle. Wheels hammering a maniac percussion of speed. Steam belching from pop-off like a stiff white feather. The treacherous trestle of Camino Gorge less than a mile distant. And Heinboch's Diesel-car drawing nearer!

Churchill reached for the throttle. No matter how close the pursuit, he had to shut off his power now that the locomotive was lunging downhill. This insane pace must be braked before they hit the trestle. Otherwise—

Diana tugged at his arm. "Brick! Look!"

His eyes widened as he stared in the direction of her pointing finger. "What in God's name—?"

LOLITA, the peon girl, had fallen to the heaving iron deck between cab and tender, her skirt rucked up past her thighs. A dark splotch stained the back of her dress and she rolled limply with each jerking plunge of the engine.

Churchill leaped to her, lifted her. His palm sank into swelling flesh, but he gave it no thought. "Lolita, what's wrong?"

"I . . . am finished . . . a bullet struck me . . . just as we began . . . to move . . . I held out as long as I could . . ."

His throat ached with tightness. She had fired the boiler with a slug through her lungs! He propped her in the left side of the cab and staggered back to his

(Continued on page 89)

By
C. A. M. DONNE



Slim and white, she was, all
shining like a statue in ivory,
and beautiful as a dream.

White Man's MAGIC

TERROR made a quaking caricature of the Kaffir scout.

His eyes rolled whitely in their sockets, his thick nostrils flared like a water buffalo's, the shaft of his shovel-bladed assegai

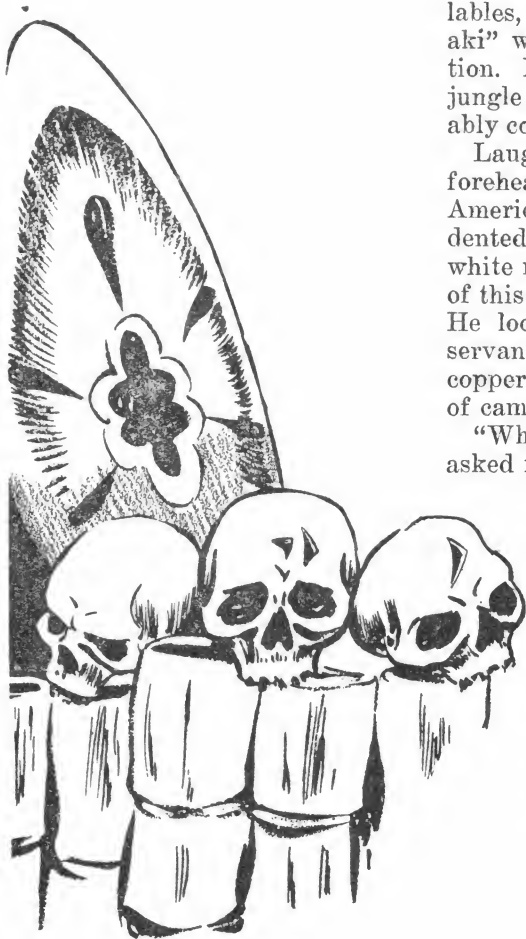
rattled against the five-foot length of his bullhide shield.

Hearing the gibberish pouring from the gray lips, without understanding it, Rex Laughlin muttered, "Wadis!" But he shook his head when, out of the guttural syllables, the words "tabu" and "Berl-aki" were made plain by reiteration. Not Wadis, then. Magic—jungle voodoo. The scout had probably come across a skull on a stick.

Laughlin wiped sweat from his forehead. He was a lean young American in tattered khaki and a dented sun helmet, and the only white man within a hundred miles of this point in the Belgian Congo. He looked at Tumba, his Masai servant, standing straight as a copper statue beneath the weight of cameras and rifles.

"What says the fool?" Laughlin asked in the Bantu dialect.

He had heard of the Sign of the White Witch, the Mark of the Death That Lives, and he determined to learn the truth. He didn't dream that, deep in the jungle, he was destined to find both love and fortune



Tumba regarded the Kaffir with the contemptuous superiority of a jungle-born tribesman who has lived much among whites. Yet his manner was grave and not untinged with awe.

"Bwana, he has seen the sign of the White Witch, the mark of the Death That Lives. He has put fear into the craven ones."

Laughlin looked at the four porters, who had unslung their heavy packs and were leaning on their spears. They were Kaffirs all—nearly nude black men with bone ornaments thrust through their ear lobes and noses. They stared at the ground or into the gloomy shadows of the forest, refusing to meet his eyes.

Laughlin said loudly, "It is false magic. Mine is stronger."

They fidgeted, unimpressed.

The explorer turned, hiding the excitement he felt at the mention of Berl-aki, the White Witch, the Wadi goddess who was said to dwell in an ivory temple in a secret kraal. The Wadis had made ivory sacred to her, so ran the legend, and had gathered a fortune in elephant tusks to insure her favor.

There were men who suspected that a black witch doctor had invented Berl-aki out of mercenary motives, planning to sell her sacred ivory hoard to the white traders when it had grown large enough. But for two years the natives had shivered at the mention of the goddess, and Laughlin could not believe she was altogether mythical.

He reflected that if she were real, and if he should find her and live to tell the story, his fortune would be made. The book he would write about her, the lectures he would

give, would capture the public's fancy beyond anything he had ever produced. Then he could satisfy his hunger for adventure and discovery fully and add worthwhile contributions to civilized man's scanty knowledge of primitive outposts. There would be no more shoestrapping expeditions like this one, financed out of skimpy advances from magazines and scientific foundations in anticipation of articles and photographs and relics.

His blue eyes shone with the brightness of the thought. He said to Tumba, "We'll have a look up ahead. The Kaffirs won't budge till we do." He loosened his revolver in its holster and started along the path by which the scout had retreated so precipitately.

THE way led through bush luxuriant enough to cut off sunlight completely. Thorns tore at Laughlin's clothes, insects swarmed around him in clouds, brightly colored birds screeched and darted. The ground was pocked with little hollows.

He watched for a tabu sign—a skull or a pair of ceremonial spears crossed over the path—but he was utterly unprepared for what awaited him.

An almost naked girl cowered at the bottom of one of the hollows, so nearly the color of the gray litter of decaying vegetation that Laughlin all but stepped on her before her moan sent him leaping back. She was a Wadi girl in the first bloom of womanhood, slim and dark-skinned, with pointed breasts and supple limbs. She had been a magnificent creature.

Had been—for now she groveled beneath the mark of the Death That Lives, and Laughlin felt deep pity for her as he understood for the first time what that strange phrase meant. He stared in horror at the silver-gray patches on the girl's body.

Tumba had halted in his tracks. He stammered in Bantu, "It is not well to go nearer, Bwana. The White Witch has long arms."

"The White Witch," Laughlin said grimly, "must be a leper goddess. Being sick, she can make others sick, like this girl. But in that case she will die, too."

Tumba shook his head. "She will not die. She is not sick. Her hair is silver as the belly of a serpent, yet she grows younger each day. I have not seen her, but I have been told."

Laughlin scowled. "We shall see. Meanwhile, since you know her language, ask this child how far she has wandered from her kraal. Tell her we will take her back there and make her last hours comfortable. And if the White Witch is there, we will find her and make pictures of her with the magic boxes you carry."

Tumba's lips and tongue made clucking noises. The girl's hopeless face took on a glimmer of intelligence. She raised herself laboriously, panting with weakness. Except for the poisonous patches of leprosy upon her skin and the despair of approaching death in her eyes, she was a creature of wild, graceful beauty.

She replied to Tumba in tones so subdued that he had to lean close to hear. He did so unwillingly. He translated, "She says, Bwa-

na, that the kraal of her tribe is—"

A darting, whispering thing of death cut across the sentence. A choked sob was wrenched from the girl's throat. Tumba sprang for the shelter of a clump of thorn bushes and Laughlin whipped the revolver from the holster.

The girl struggled almost erect, then fell upon her back, her bare legs thrashing. Blood gushed in a crimson torrent from her breast, where the blade of a spear had driven deep. The blade moved, weighted down by its feather-decked shaft, and the wound widened horribly.

Beside a mimosa tree, a hundred feet away, a brown shadow melted into deeper shadows. Laughlin aimed the revolver, fired, and bark flew from the side of the mimosa.

SUDDENLY shrill yells rent the air. Out of the jungle danced warriors, more than a score of them, their black faces and bodies streaked hideously with white, their braceleted arms brandishing shields and assegais.

Laughlin cried in Bantu, hoping to be understood, "I come as a friend!"

Beady eyes glared at him without comprehension. A spearhead thudded into the earth at his feet.

He crouched beside the dead girl and triggered the revolver. A warrior leaped high in the air and fell dead, the bridge of his nose smashed by a .45 lead slug. Another screamed and clasped a torn thigh. But the twisted, running figures made poor targets and he emptied the gun without discouraging more than those two.

There was no time to reload.

Laughlin stood tensely while the keen blades circled him, waiting for the agony of them in his chest and stomach. No use saying anything; they could not understand him, and Tumba, the interpreter, had faded into the green mystery of the forest. In another minute, he thought, his lifeless body would be sprawled beside that of the naked black girl, food for the prowling carnivores and swarming ants, and thus would end his adventuresome career before it had fairly begun. . . .

But the Wadis did not intend to kill him immediately. They bent his arms behind him and bound them with strips of flexible bark. They prodded him with spears, forcing him along an all but invisible trail, scolding him harshly when he tripped over vines and gnarled roots.

He had little hope of mercy, rescue or escape. His Kaffir porters were dead or fleeing in terror. Tumba might have survived, but more likely a Wadi spear had brought him down. The nearest white settlement was a hundred miles away.

These days the Wadis were careful about killing white men. The Belgians had taught them bitter lessons, slaughtering a hundred natives and burning a dozen villages to avenge the death of one white. But the Wadis would protect the secret of their cache of sacred ivory, if such a thing actually existed — and when they wanted to kill, they knew cunning ways. . . .

They knew how to tie a stripped man over an anthill so that the giant emmets would pick his bones

clean of flesh. They knew of deep beds of quicksand. There was always fire; and it was said that at certain seasons there were still cannibalistic feasts. . . .

The jungle began to thin out. Sunlight came between the branches and now and then there were glimpses of hot blue sky. The trail was plainer and at intervals grisly markers hung upon bushes. Here a mummified human hand swung beneath a twig; there a thighbone dangled. The conical tops of thatched huts could be seen in a clearing ahead.

Carved posts, weirdly symbolic, made a gateway at one side of the trail. They were topped by white skulls, indicating that the region beyond was tabu, not to be entered except by the sanctified. Laughlin looked between the posts and halted with an exclamation, unmindful of the pricking spears behind him.

He stared along a lane curbed with glistening human skeletons. It led to a stake fence surrounding a lofty hut. Ghost-white guards with plumed headdresses stood around the fence, holding ceremonial spears. They were warriors daubed from head to toe with clay.

Framed in an opening in the fence, with crossed elephant tusks above her, stood a slim, shinning girl, like an exquisitely carved statue in ivory, nude except for a scanty binding for her breasts and a brief kirtle that clung to her tapered thighs. Long hair, white as milk, cascaded over her shoulders and caressed the curves of her youthful bosom. In all her lithe figure was no color—only shadows



A darting, whispering
thing of death cut
through the air.

where her eyes and mouth were
and where the muscles and curves
of her body shaped entrancing
contours.

THE White Witch, whose cult
had spread creeping fear all
along the sluggish course of the
Congo—and she was as beautiful
as a dream!

With the spears prodding him,
Laughlin moved on into the kraal,
which lay a hundred yards past
this fantastic stockaded hut and

its mysterious mistress, like a dazed man. . . .

The ancient witch doctor of the Wadis squatted on a stool in front of his juju hut and glared at the white man through the eyeholes of a wooden mask carved with hideous grotesqueries. His scrawny neck supported a necklace of infants' skulls and the bony structure of a skeleton was sketched on his skinny limbs and torso.

Within the circle of the huts, warriors made a tighter circle about Laughlin. Behind the warriors stood the women—shriveled crones, plump-breasted mothers with children clinging to their bare legs, sleek-hipped maidens.

The sun was a dull red fire over the jungle in the west. The smoke of a smaller fire at the feet of the witch doctor gave off the foul stench of magic powders. The old priest held his hands in the smoke, went through the motions of washing them, and croaked a command.

Warriors leveled their spears and closed in on Laughlin, signing him to move. The crowd divided to let him pass through, thick lips grinning cruelly, voices muttering the name of Berl-aki.

Laughlin divined that, in some manner, he was to be sacrificed to the White Witch. A chill crawled along his spine, but stronger than his fear was his sense of disappointment. To carry cameras and notebooks hundreds of miles through the haunted rivers and forests of the Congo, to find the most mysterious being in all that land of mys-

tery, and not to be able to take back pictures and knowledge of her to the outer world—that was the height of irony!

She would be an albino native, he guessed; perhaps a leper, although it might only be that her coloring—or lack of it—appealed to the superstitious minds of the natives and made them think her responsible for the white plague of leprosy among them. He shuddered, wondering if leprosy were the fate decreed for him.

They came to the skull-tipped gateposts and the guards halted. Four temple guards, ghastly in their white paint, came forward. They escorted Laughlin beneath the crossed tusks and within the staked fence. Before the door of the temple-hut—which was not of ivory, as the tales had said, but still was more elaborate than most—they thrust him against a thick post, bound him securely and withdrew beyond the fence.

The White Witch was nowhere in sight.

Laughlin tugged at the strips of bark and realized that he could never break them. It came to him that even if he succeeded in freeing himself, the guards would kill him before he could escape from the tabu area. And if he gained the jungle, what chance had he of reaching safety, alone and without food or weapons?

He waited, his nerves straining in the eerie silence, for whatever might come next. Shadows lengthened, dusk began to gather, and from a swamp nearby a sickly mist crept into the fenced space. . . .

THE dusk was so deep that he did not see the White Witch when first she appeared in the doorway of the hut. Lost in his own dismal thoughts, he was unaware of her until she spoke, hardly above a whisper, but in a language that cleared his brain instantly of all the horrid pictures that had tormented it.

"Are you English?" she asked.

His startled eyes could barely make out her figure within the doorway. She leaned toward him, holding her hands over her bosom modestly, and a warm feeling of excitement stirred within him.

"I'm an American, like you," he said, keeping his voice low. "I'm Rex Laughlin from Boston, a would-be explorer." He knew by her accent that she came from somewhere in the States, and strained against his bonds to get a better look at her.

"Don't struggle." He could see her head turning as her eyes made certain that none of the guards was inside the enclosure. "When it's darker I'll loosen the strips and make you as comfortable as possible. I'm afraid that's all I can do for you."

"You can tell me who you really are. I've heard many stories about you. The blacks say you're a witch."

"I'm a prisoner like yourself." In her voice was a note of mournfulness that made him long to comfort her.

"But the natives worship you. You're a goddess to them. They make sacrifices to you—ivory and human lives—"

Something very like a sob silenced him. She murmured, after

a long pause, "I know what the natives say. It isn't true, but it has kept them from killing me. Their name for me, Berl-aki, is as near as they can come to my real name. If you're an explorer, you may have heard of Pearl Akin."

He gasped in his astonishment. "Heard of her! The whole world heard of her a couple of years ago. She—you—and your father, Bruce Akin, were lost while mapping the White Nile. The English sent out searching parties. But that was in the Egyptian Sudan, five or six hundred miles from here!"

"Not that far. We traveled south of the border of the Congo, looking for the source of the river, and the Wadis attacked us. They killed Dad and the blacks—everyone but me—and only my hair saved me. It's natural color is platinum. The natives had never seen anything like it.

"They brought me here, and as soon as I arrived an epidemic of leprosy broke out. A dozen men and women had it. They thought I was repsonsible, because my skin is almost as white as the skin of a leper. They began to worship me and built this temple and brought me elephant tusks, and almost immediately the leprosy disappeared. They drove the sufferers into the jungle to die, and no one else caught it.

"The chief's son, a boy of five or six, was sick, and they brought him to me. I know something about nursing. I bathed him and fed him the proper food, and he recovered.

"Now they're afraid to come too near me, but they bring me food

and ivory. When a member of the tribe gets leprosy they think he has displeased me and send him into the jungle to die. Two or three days ago they drove out a sick girl. If they wish to condemn anyone to death, they send him here."

"What happens then?"

"I don't harm him," she said bitterly, "but I might as well. When a person has spent a night here, bound as you are, he is supposed to have contracted leprosy. They send him into the bush and warriors follow and watch to be sure he eats nothing. In a few days he dies of sickness or starvation."

"That's what will happen to me?"

Her head bent. "I'm afraid so. I don't know how to prevent it. They keep their distance from me and won't let me outside the fence, and I don't know their language. I have no weapons. You couldn't ever return to civilization, because they would watch you."

LAUGHLIN grinned sardonically. Under such circumstances murder became almost a perfect crime. Even if his body should be found by a jungle patrol, the authorities could not punish the Wadis because an American explorer had died of starvation.

"Wouldn't you like to escape, Berl-aki?"

She exhaled breath in a long sigh. "Escape! I've dreamed of it for five hundred nights. You're the first white person I've seen in that long. I was eighteen when I left New York—just old enough

to have begun to live—and now I'm worse than dead. If I thought there was a chance in a million of getting away. . . ."

"We can try," he said. "We have nothing to lose, Pearl. It's dark now; untie me and I'll try to make a plan."

She crept toward him. "Don't make any sudden movements. The guards' eyes are sharp. They'll know I'm not a goodess, after all, and kill us both if they find out I've set you free."

Her hands fumbled with the knots. Her fingers were gentle and her cool, shadowed skin was as pale as flower petals and as fragrant. From the soft shining of her eyes he judged that they were hazel. The bark fell away, blood flowed into his wrists again and it was good to be able to swing his arms.

"Come into the hut," Pearl whispered. "The moon will rise soon and the guards will see us if we stay here."

He followed her cautiously into the dark structure. By straining his eyes he could just make out the objects it contained. There were rush mats and furs and blankets for sleeping. In a corner was an enormous pile of elephant tusks worth many thousands of dollars.

"Wealth," he said, "but not much luxury."

"You can't think how horrible it has been! No one to talk to, nothing to read, nothing to do . . . sometimes I've been sure I was going mad. I've dreamed of being rescued." She was crying and, he thought, laughing at the same time. "My rescuer was always

The impact of the shot
hurled the witch doctor
back into the flames.



tall and young and American, like you. But now that you're here, they'll kill you. . . ."

"Stop it," he said firmly. "I've been in some tough scrapes and come through them all right. None was as bad as this, but then, each of them was worse than anything that had happened before. . . ."

He stopped talking because her weeping was almost hysterical. He put out his hand and touched the smooth skin of her shoulder. A thrill went through him—not the casual thrill of a man who has been a long time away from women, but the sharp electrical tingle that comes when a man meets a woman capable of stirring him as few other women have or will. He drew her gently toward him and she lay passively against his chest, quivering from head to foot like a frightened child.

"Hush," he whispered, leading her to the pile of mats and furs, making her sit there, and sitting close beside her. "It's all right, Pearl. You've been alone all this time, but now there are two of us to fight against them."

"I'm only crying—because I'm happier—than I've ever been," she sobbed. "And I'm only afraid—because I don't want—anything to happen to you."

The fragrance of her hair was in his nostrils and the warmth of her nearly nude body was all through him. He cupped her chin in his hand, raised her face and kissed her parted lips. Her mouth clung tenaciously, sweetly, for a long moment of perfect bliss—and then, like a thunderstorm breaking, emotion broke in irresistible waves over them.

Her bare arms went around him, fierce and tight, her soft breasts flattening against his chest. Her lips, moist and kiss-swollen, murmured against his cheek. Her cool flesh was palpitant and eager for caresses. Holding her close, with his blood turned to liquid fire in his veins, he forgot the danger that encircled them, forgot all but the magic of their love. . . .

THE soft sound came minutes later. Laughlin had so completely lost the memory of the threat that hung over him that he felt no instant alarm as he raised his head and glanced toward the door of the hut.

For a fractional second he had the shocked impression that the skeletons bordering the avenue outside had come to life. Then the true identity of the spectral white figures grouped at the door burst upon him and he lunged erect, clenching his fists.

The moon had risen, its soft light penetrating the darkness and the mist. By its glow the temple guards had seen that their prisoner was no longer tied to the stake, and had come to investigate. They stood with leveled spears, threatening, surely convinced by what they saw that their goddess was only a mortal, after all.

Laughlin seized a small ivory tusk from the pile in the corner. It was all he could do to lift and swing it. He heard the girl scream as the figures converged upon him, and felt and heard a skull crack like an eggshell beneath his cudgel. One of the pallid

guards crumpled, a dark stain spreading over his headdress. But the others were upon Laughlin before he could swing the tusk again.

The butt of a spear punched into his stomach, driving the breath from him, doubling him up. Something heavier than a fist smashed against his temple, lighting fireworks within his brain. He went down, fighting to retain consciousness.

Thongs were whipped about his wrists and ankles. The pain of them came dully through the stupefaction that lay like a fog over him. He heard Pearl's frightened voice pleading with him.

"Try to save yourself, Rex! Don't try to save me! They're taking me to the village, and you could never get past the guards to reach me. If they send you into the jungle you may make your escape somehow. . . ."

He saw two of the warriors dragging her between them toward the trail. They gripped her white arms tightly, no longer afraid of her. Whatever hold of fear she had maintained over their superstitious minds was gone now, swept away by the fact of her submission to the kisses of the explorer, which proved that she was not divine. She was the White Witch no longer, but only a helpless girl of an alien race. . . .

THE dead warrior lay on the floor of the hut beside Laughlin and a single living one stood just within the door, resting on his spear. Laughlin was not to know what would happen to Berl-

aki; he was to lie here, under guard, while the witch doctor judged her. After that his turn would come.

He shouted curses at the impassive guard until his lungs gasped for air and his throat was raw. . . .

From the kraal came a hubbub of voices, a mutter of drums. The fallen goddess would be arraigned now before the ancient one with his necklace of babies' skulls, and the blacks would be pressing around her, grinning. They would be in awe of her at first, but the awe would go away when they saw how frightened she was. Then they could hate her for having imposed upon their credulity, never stopping to think that she was not at fault. They would demand her destruction, lusting for blood, and would gloat over her sufferings.

And he, who had tasted her loveliness and would carry the shining vision of her beauty to the grave with him if he lived for a million years, was powerless to help her. Tugging at the bonds, he realized despairingly that, were he twice as strong, he could not break them. . . .

He saw a tall white figure enter the gate and stride toward the hut, bearing a spear and something else. It was one of those who had dragged Pearl away, he thought, returning for him. He was glad. At least he would be near her; if he could not save her, he might comfort her a little.

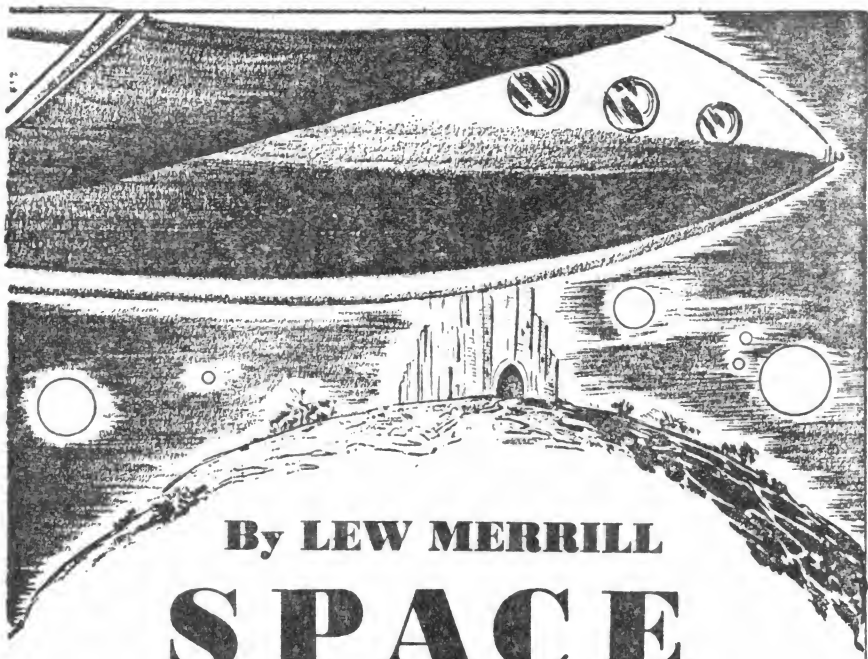
If only he could borrow some of the storied magic of the voodoo priests and escape with Pearl

(Continued on page 92)

It was a challenge Bill couldn't ignore. His mortal enemy had dared him to combat in that space more than five astronomical units from earth. Though he knew his weapons were far inferior, he knew, too, that Sparling had in his power the girl Bill loved

Bill reached up and grabbed a fin of his ship. They had won!





By LEW MERRILL

SPACE BURIAL

BILL SPARLING, roused from his well-earned nap by the shout of Vulcan, his Martian aide, went forward to the wheel of the little Jonesing spaceship. Putting his eyes to the refracting optoscope Bill could see a curious, elongated body some five hundred miles ahead.

He glanced at the dial of the Jonesite gravity tank. Plenty of gas to take him to Hungaria, the first of the outer planetoids. He thumbed the speed control, and saw the indicator drop to a thousand miles an hour—to five hundred—to a hundred and ten. That was as slow as he dared drive the old ark; anything under that would bring her within the gravi-

tational field—not of Hungaria, but of menacing Jupiter. And many a better and stronger Jonesing ship had been wrecked by the terrific planet, dashed to destruction in the heart of its boiling mass.

The *Girl Unknown* was idling in space now. Bill watched the distant object, then looked at the gravitational equivalent dial. The needle was creeping up—that red thread whose approach to the black line meant danger. Once it crossed it, the anti-gravitational force would be less than Jupiter's attraction. Bill increased his speed to a hundred and thirty, and the red line remained stationary, began to recede. The elongated

body was coming plainly into view.

"Is a man!" shouted Vulcan. No Martian could use the explosive, tongue-to-palate sound of "t."

It was the body of a man. Bill watched in amazement as the *Girl Unknown* moved toward it. Then a cry broke from his lips. He recognized that face, with the shock of snow-white hair, the straggling white beard, even though the habitual black clothing had been stripped off and the corpse flung to destruction in its thermotex underwear.

It was the body of old Houghton, the missionary on the Hilda group of planetoids, beyond the gap that separated them from Eros and Hungaria. Everybody knew and loved Houghton. Even his enemies, of the nectarine trade, respected him, despite the fact that he was their bitter opponent in their nefarious business.

A last glance through the optoscope showed Bill the manner in which the old man had met his death. The top of the head had been crushed in by a ferocious blow.

Mechanically Bill's hand went to the grapppler. The first cast hooked the body, and the mechanism drew it up through the void-locks inside the ship. Bill placed it on the long seat and looked at it, swallowing hard, thinking.

The body was not, of course, decomposed, in the absence of air and bacteria, though it was considerably desiccated, owing to the dissipation of the body fluids into

space, so that it was becoming mummified. Probably Houghton had been dead about a week.

Bill's anxiety grew. If Houghton's enemies had got him, what about Ursula? When she was graduated from high school in New York she had insisted on rejoining her father at his headquarters on Hilda, where she had been born, and grew up. Bill, who had brought Houghton news of his daughter, and vice-versa, on his periodical visits, had joined the chorus that urged the girl to remain on earth. In a few years, Houghton's service would end, and the Board would pension him. Life on the planetoid Hilda offered nothing, except the company of her father.

One of the marvels of astronomical research had been the discovery that the major planetoids retained an atmosphere. But there had been only vegetative life on them, until their settlement by political exiles, two hundred years before.

These had quickly slipped into a state of white savagery, existing on the ground-fruits that were plentiful on all the planetoids. They had been forgotten during the century of civil wars on Earth. And now they had come into prominence because of the illicit "nectarine" trade.

Because the population of Earth, now numbering no more than a million, had almost ceased to reproduce itself, owing to inbreeding, a score of governments welcomed the introduction of fresh blood in the shape of planetoid girls, through whom the race could be rejuvenated. These were

sold at fabulous prices. And the central government at New York had strictly forbidden the traffic, on account of the abuses to which it gave rise.

Despite the presence of space-cruisers, the surreptitious traffic in human flesh continued. Houghton had devoted most of his energies to helping suppress it. Now they had got him. And Bill Sparling could guess who was at the back of the dastardly murder.

His fears for Ursula grew. For she was the "Unknown Girl" after whom he had named his ship. A lucky strike of Jonesite, and he would be in a position to ask her to marry him.

IN SPITE of the development of anti-gravitational fields, which made possible journeys to the planets, these had always had a considerable element of danger in them until the discovery of Jonesite. And that had been the scientific sensation of its decade.

Among the innumerable particles that filled all known space, certain ones had been discovered that remained more or less stationary, instead of rushing on an erratic course at the rate of thousands of miles a minute. These were hard gray pellets which, analyzed, proved to be of osmonium, the heaviest of the elements, one of the uranium group.

And, like uranium, osmonium was constantly giving forth a radioactive property that had the unique effect of neutralizing gravitation.

The most valuable of the elements, osmonium could not be discovered in sufficient quantities.

Hence the vast fleets of Jonesing ships, plying among the plane-toids, the staking out of claims, the violence and lawlessness among the crews, the rivalries and battles.

Hungaria, the outermost plane-toid, was pretty well policed. But the Hilda group, at a distance of 3.9 astronomical units, was the hunting-ground of the Jonesing ships, which were not averse from a little nectarining on the side. Past solitary Thule were the six of the Trojan group, at 5.2 units' distance from Earth, and here even the space-cruisers did not ply. For the six Trojans were too perilously close to the orbit of Jupiter when in aphelion.

Well, there was nothing to do but commit Houghton's body to its last repose. Bill wrapped a blanket about it, spoke the few words of the burial service that he could remember, went to the front, and took the wheel from Vulcan. A glance at the complicated direction chart above his head, a brief calculation, and he changed direction, set the speed control again. The ship leaped up to a thousand, two thousand, four thousand miles an hour.

"Huh! Ranger!" shouted Vulcan, shaking his woolly head. "Danger" was what Vulcan had meant to say. He pointed to the g.e. dial. The red thread was almost over the black needle.

"It's all right," said Bill. He stepped back and opened the void-locks. He took old Houghton's body in his arms and placed it in the cage. Soundlessly it slid into the void.

Bill changed direction for Hun-

garia. The red thread slipped back. He had driven the ship just close enough to the orbit of Jupiter to insure that Houghton's body would fall into the maw of the giant planet or join the ceaseless, innumerable procession of its satellites.

Space-burial! Well, it was a fitting end for the old missionary. But fear for Ursula, and black rage on account of her father's murder, tore at Bill's heart. He meant to pick up certain trails on Hungaria, principally that of Jeribald and his gang of Jonesites and nectariners.

LI MOW'S was packed to overflowing, for Bill had arrived at the time of the semi-annual sale of Jonesite. It was crammed with the Chinese buyers who almost monopolized the trade. Several score of Jonesite fishers, whose ships lay moored in the air-harbor, were staggering about the group of buildings that comprised the bar, letting themselves go in drunken frenzy, fighting, quarreling, or drinking at the bar, and displaying fistfuls of the precious chunks to prospective purchasers.

The atmosphere on all the planetoids that possessed an atmosphere corresponded to that on Earth—had, in fact, been captured from Earth's moon and from Mars, scientists thought, through some principle not yet completely elucidated. The main difference was that a visitor to Hungaria had to wear half-ton shoes—containing a nucleus of matter under dwarf-star condensation—to keep from covering a thousand yards at every stride,

on account of the slight gravitational attraction.

Stamping up toward the building, Bill heard titters from windows. Girls in extreme *déshabille* were leaning out, gesturing to him. Girls of any age from eighteen to thirty. Li Mow prided himself upon his *clientèle*. Other space-houses might take the dregs and leavings of Earth, especially the "nectarines" who were trying to drift back to their planetoids—and seldom reached them. Li Mow was particular.

Earth, under her woman rulers, had taken all the joys out of life. Death for drinking, death for smoking, death for love outside the marital bond—which accounted for most of the bootleg love provided by the "nectarines." But even the captains of the space-cruisers winked at what went on upon Hungaria. You couldn't push human nature beyond a certain limit. Hungaria was the red-light district of the planetary system. It had to be, and the woman rulers had to wink at its existence too.

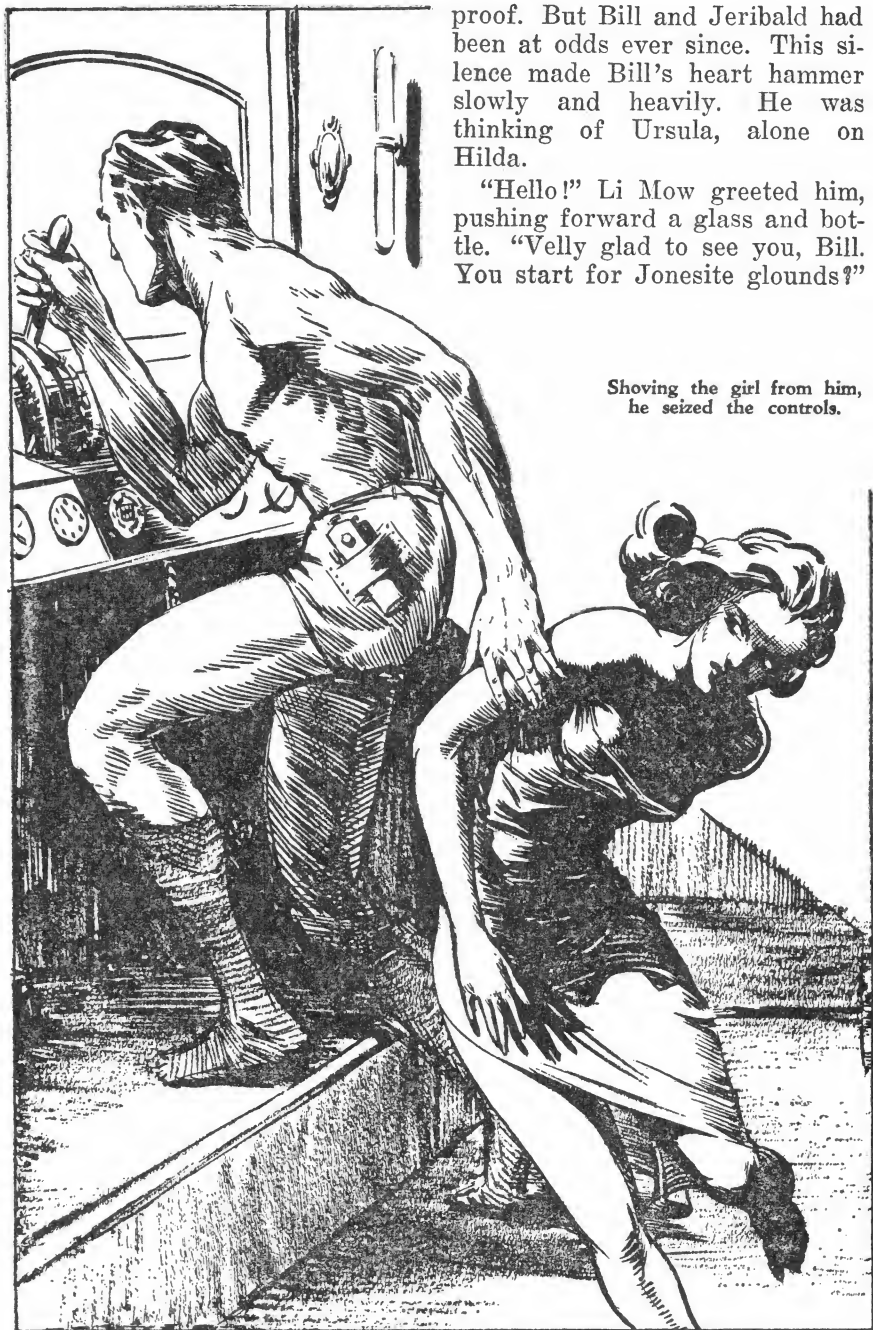
THERE fell a silence as Bill approached the long bar, and Bill read the confirmation of his worst fears in it. Jeribald was the most notorious nectariner among the planetoids. That wasn't Bill's business, but Jeribald and his men were suspected of having robbed and murdered one of Bill's friends.

A crude job. They had miscalculated their space-burial, so that the battered body had come floating down to the surface of Hungaria later. There was no

proof. But Bill and Jeribald had been at odds ever since. This silence made Bill's heart hammer slowly and heavily. He was thinking of Ursula, alone on Hilda.

"Hello!" Li Mow greeted him, pushing forward a glass and bottle. "Velly glad to see you, Bill. You start for Jonesite glounds?"

Shoving the girl from him,
he seized the controls.



"Where's Mr. Houghton?" demanded Bill abruptly. The old man used to hold a missionary meeting about the time of each sale; his old ship, scraped and battered by swarms of aerolites, between Hungaria and Hilda, was a space-mark.

"Not come yet," said Li Mow.

Bill looked about him, and saw that everybody present knew what had happened to Houghton, even the little dusky Martians, scurrying about with glasses.

"All ships not yet come, Lil Mow continued. "Jellibald ship not yet come. You bling Jonesite? You want to sell?"

"No, I've been on Earth the past season," said Bill. His mother was sick, had urged him to remain, but Bill wanted one more trip to a field he had discovered, where the Jonesite pellets were thick. Then he believed he could persuade Ursula to leave her father and try luck with him.

"I'll have plenty Jonesite for you when I come back," he said.

"Plices go down. You better hully," said Li Mow, and everybody laughed. "Jellibald find a new field, plenty Jonesite there. He no care if plice goes down. Beyond Hilda group, near Thule."

Now Bill understood, from the grinning faces about him. That was no doubt the field he had himself discovered. He had staked it out with flags and Jonesite beacons, a quadrangle in space fifty thousand square miles in extent that no tug of gravity could affect. Within that space, by law, all Jonesite pellets were his.

But Jeribald wasn't likely to respect his claim. Jeribald had

Tuck, Garrou, and Blacky, the Martian, with him, three outstanding ruffians, and his ship carried a three-millimeter neutron gun, in flat defiance of the law against the arming of space-ships. She could smash anything except a space-cruiser.

HOT rage burned in Bill as he turned away, conscious of the covert sneers of everybody in Li Mow's. Out among the Hilda planetoids, where it was every man for himself, the will of the strongest man was law. Poor Danny Briggs had disputed that law, and his battered body, gravitating to Hungaria, had attested to it. Bill had been waiting to catch Jeribald ever since.

He let his hand close over his neutron pistol. The feel of it under his pultex gave him courage. He moved up the street toward the harbor, over which the lit boats moved like fireflies as they scurried between the small wharf and the ships at anchor. Again he heard the tittering of the girls at the windows. Then his name called:

"Bill! Bill Sparling!"

The girls knew him, of course, and always mocked him, because he would have nothing to do with them. But the sound of his name made him turn. He saw a woman's face hazily outlined under her robe in the light of the little solar lamp behind her.

"Come here, and I'll tell you what you want to know."

"What do I want to know?" Bill parried. But then he recognized the girl. Her name was Astra, and she had been nectarined to

Earth in childhood. Jeribald had got possession of her, and brought her to Hungaria, used her as his intermediary in many shady transactions that concerned Jonesite. Also in matters political, since Hungaria was one of the military bastions of Earth. Whoever ruled Hungaria, was master of Earth, the proverb ran. Hence the presence of the space-cruisers, which were not among the plane-toids solely to preserve order among the Jonesites.

The girl disappeared. A handle clicked, a door slid back. The little solar light within shed a shaded glow over the room, with its sumptuous furniture. A rich, hand-woven rug covered the floor, a thinner one the divan, which was piled with pillows.

"I never thought that I should see you here, Bill Sparling," said Astra.

"Nor I you," answered Bill. "I thought that Jeribald always took you along with him on his trips to the Jonesite fields."

INSTEAD of answering, she flung back the silken robe that covered her. Beneath it was a short, gossamer-thin garment, spun of spider-silk, and flashing with all the colors of the spectrum as the solar light caught its shimmering folds. It fell from bosom to knee, but hid nothing of Astra's beauty. From the curve of the shapely shoulders, from the perfection of her small, firm breasts, to the tapering waist and the curving thighs ran streaks of opalescent flame.

Astra shook her head, and her heavy, red-gold hair tumbled in

a cascade down her back. She extended two arms of alabaster, put her hands on Bill's shoulders.

"You've been so blind, Bill. I've loved you so long, and Jeribald kept me close when he had me in his ship."

She drew closer to him, and the perfume of her made Bill giddy; the warmth of her made his heart beat fast as her arms circled his neck.

"I've seen you often and I've always loved you, Bill. Jeribald guessed it. That's one of the reasons why he hates you. Kiss me, Bill, and I'll tell you what you want to know."

Her lips met his with crushing pressure, and the roundness of her breasts became a broken bar against his chest. Astra hadn't been a nectarine for nothing; she had been taught the arts of love in the infamous school on Hilda, against which poor old Houghton had fought so vainly.

Against such arts, Bill had as much chance as a kitten in the grip of a terrier. His head swam, and, grasping Astra in his arms, he swayed heavily toward the divan.

Astra's spider-silk underwear seemed to melt into her body, which became a rippling, iridescent glow. Streaks of that opal fire traversed it as it strained itself against Bill in undulations that shot fire through all his arteries.

Then slowly the thought of Ursula came back to Bill, and whips of shame scourged him. He groaned, and heard Astra's tinkling laughter.

"Take me with you, Bill, and I

will show you where she is." she said.

"Has Jeribald got her?"

"He said he was going to seize her and take her to his hideout in the Trojans."

"The Trojans? He can't venture there."

"His hideout is on Nestor. He has enough Jonesite to keep his ship from being drawn into Jupiter's orbit. But we may find him on the field you staked out near Hilda. He is seizing all the Jonesite there. You take me, and I'll show you."

"I—can't—take you."

"I am going to show Jeribald I don't care, because I have you now. If you don't take me, I won't show you his hideout on Nestor. I know just where it is; he has described it many times."

THERE wasn't any arguing with Astra, and it was no use telling her that he loved Ursula. The minds of the nectarines didn't look forward to the future in the way of Earth-minds. Astra meant to accompany Bill on his journey, and that was the end of it.

Taking a boat back to the *Girl Unknown* with Astra, Bill found Vulcan engaged in checking the fuelling of Jonesite gas from the supply tender. The brief darkness had already given place to the subdued daylight on Hungaria. The sun, one-third the size that it appeared from Earth, was traversing the heavens in its swift course. Bill relieved Astra and himself of their half-ton shoes, and found another pultex suit for her, a perfect non-conductor of

temperature, alike on the air-en-circled asteroids and in airless space. He laid it out beside her, and set out a meal of Earth-baked bread and some tinned stuff.

He had set a course direct for Hilda. The *Girl Unknown* could outspeed Jeribald's more powerful but clumsier ship. If Jeribald was on the claim that he had staked out, Bill meant to anchor behind the rocks of Hilda and try to capture the larger boat by surprise. He didn't dare let his mind dwell on Ursula. He resigned himself to the long hours of waiting.

Astra snuggled up beside him. She had put off her robe in the hot compartment, and she was a nectarine girl, for whom life meant love. In the circle of her arms, and dazed by the shimmering undergarment, Bill was lost again.

Hours passed. Day and night followed each other at brief intervals. Sometimes Astra whispered to Bill of a life on Earth, after she had avenged herself on Jeribald for the trick he had played her. Sometimes Bill lay, sunk in exhaustive, gloomily anticipating the future, until Astra's white arms involved his senses again. He hated her in the intermissions of her embraces, and he couldn't see how he could manage to free himself from her.

Out of the lethargy that held him, Bill was aroused by a shout from Vulcan, who, like all Martians, slept only at intervals of two Earth-weeks, and had been sitting tirelessly at the controls.

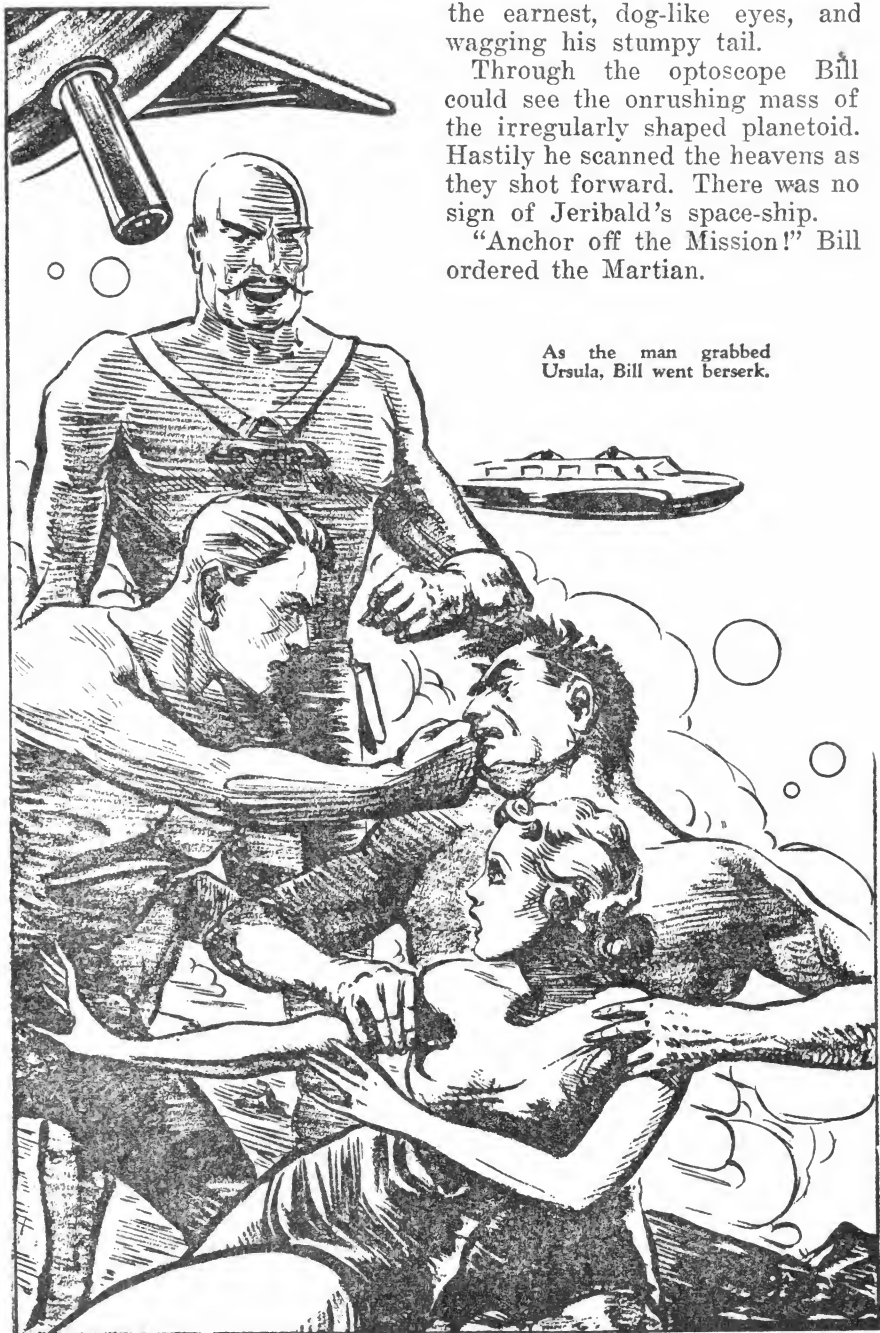
Hilda, Mas'er! Hilda!" he called, raising his black face with

the earnest, dog-like eyes, and wagging his stumpy tail.

Through the optoscope Bill could see the onrushing mass of the irregularly shaped planetoid. Hastily he scanned the heavens as they shot forward. There was no sign of Jeribald's space-ship.

"Anchor off the Mission!" Bill ordered the Martian.

As the man grabbed Ursula, Bill went berserk.



CLAD in their pultex, and wearing their heavy boots, Bill and Astra disembarked on the rocky shore. The sight of the Mission appalled Bill. That was Jeribald's work all right. The pirate hadn't been content to kidnap and kill old Houghton; he had blasted the buildings of heavy stone to pieces with his neutron gun. On Earth such enormous masses heavier than the stones of the Pyramids, could hardly have been lifted save by hydraulic power, but on Hilda it had been a simple matter for Houghton to construct the Mission with his own hands.

The whole building was blasted to pieces, except for one corner, where, from beneath a crazily sagging roof, a dozen girls came trooping forward.

Wild girls, the descendants of the original exiles, nude save for the goassmer wisps of spider-web about their waists, for Hilda was hot during its brief day, and in winter the denizens retreated into the underground caves that were a feature of the asteroid. All young, all exquisitely moulded, running forward to Bill with little cries of delight.

Their white bodies swayed, their small breasts oscillated as they clung to him, while Astra stood by in scowling silence.

"Where's Ursula?" Bill demanded. "The girl who lived here with the old man. Where is she?"

"*Ka pesna hu ka sorkha,*" answered a big brunette, with a languishing look.

"She asks you to take them all away to Earth," Astra interpreted.

"Ask her where the girl is—Houghton's daughter."

There was a voluble interchange. "She says Jeribald took her away fifteen days ago, and he is coming back to take them all to Earth. She says they love you and want you to take them instead."

Fifteen days! But that meant fewer than two Earth-days. Bill grasped the girl again. "Where's Jeribald?" he shouted.

"She says," interpreted Astra, after another interchange, "that you will find out if you go to your Jonesite ground."

BILL hurled the *Unknown Girl* through space. The meteors thick about the Hilda group, battered her sides, gray chunks of Jonesite, aggregating a substantial sum in value, crashed against her duralloy sheathing. Bill had taken the controls; Astra was curled up in the rear compartment; Vulcan, his time for sleep not yet arrived, watched his master with adoring eyes. Bill hurled the vessel forward until her engine quivered, and the sound of the mechanism, inaudible without, crackled and roared as it echoed through the hollow of the shell.

He was nearing his claim now, and constantly he gazed through the optoscope, looking for Jeribald's ship.

It had grown dark, and that darkness seemed Bill's one hope. If he could creep up unobserved, and dodge the deadly neutron gun, he might grapple Jeribald's ship and board her, fight it out, he and Vulcan against Jeribald, Tuck, Garrou, and Blacky. A

desperate chance, but not more desperate than leaving Ursula in the power of the man.

Still there was no sign of Jeribald's ship. But something loomed up at about a hundred miles' distance. It was one of Bill's Jonesite beacons, with the flag atop, a structure some fifty feet high by six inches in thickness — of course it would never topple without compelling gravity — composed of lumps of crude Jonesite sufficient to render it neutral despite the shifting attractions of the whirling asteroids.

When he was within a hundred miles, Bill saw a patch of red on the flag. He slowed the ship, looked at his g.e. dial. The red needle leaped toward the red. Bill had calculated the position of Jupiter. He had halted there to stake out his claim when the pull of the mighty planet was neutralized by the proximity of Hilda. Hilda was receding. It was a gamble Bill had to take. He stopped the engine, felt the ship rock and strain, flung out his grapnel through the little handlock and drew in the sheet of red papyroid, scored by the transverse passage of a dust-sized aerolite.

A challenge from Jeribald: "If you dare, Sparling, meet me on Nestor." And beneath it, "Love," and the name erased by the aerolite. But in Ursula's writing.

Astra was looking over Bill's shoulder. "You dare not go to the Trojan group. They're too near Jupiter. Turn back, Bill. Take me away."

"I'll follow Jeribald to hell," said Bill.

Astra clung to him. "I'm afraid, Bill. And you're afraid. You dare not go to the Trojans. You haven't power enough in your ship to try. Take me back to Earth, Bill."

Bill flung the pleading girl from him and settled himself at the controls.

OUT in the void between Hilda and the Trojans was neither night nor day. The sun, a little moon, glowed red in the Zenith. And through the weird gray twilight loomed another moon, almost as large, Jupiter, the angry planet whose realm Bill was invading. Thus Bill drove toward the Trojans — toward Hector, Achilles, Agamemnon, Patroclus, Priam and Nestor, on which last Jeribald had his hideout.

Islets in the void, but islets rushing through that void in a mazy dance, obedient to their dancemaster, Jupiter. The group was more than five astronomical units from Earth, and beyond was only a single asteroid, Hidalgo, the most distant of all. Beyond the Trojans no man had ever penetrated, because the great bullying dancemaster, Jupiter, barred the way, or beckoned to a flaming death.

Now Nestor came into view. And off her shores, ablaze with solar lights, Bill saw Jeribald's ship at anchor. But there were other lights ablaze in the immense castle that Jeribald had built for himself on Nestor, where he kept his nectarines, after raiding them on the Hilda group. Huge, gray, gaunt, it loomed up through the

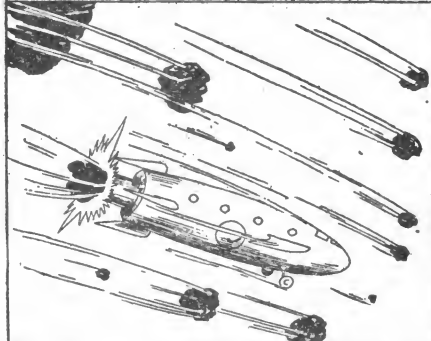
(Continued on page 96)

Diana Daw

LEAVING VENUS
DIANA AND TED
HEAD THEIR
SPACE-SHIP OUT
INTO SPACE IN
AN EFFORT TO
REACH EARTH.

By
CLAYTON
MAXWELL

SUDDENLY THE SPACE-SHIP IS OVERTAKEN BY A CLOUD OF METEORITES. ONE PLUGS THE ROCKET TUBE.



IT'S--IT'S CARRYING US STRAIGHT TOWARD THE SUN!



I'VE GOT TO TAKE OFF SOME OF THESE CLOTHES--THE HEAT IS BECOMING UNBEARABLE!

BUT THE GRAVITY OF MERCURY PULLS THEM INTO ITS ORBIT



LOOK! THERE'S MERCURY!

WE'LL CRASH! EVEN IF WE SURVIVE THE CRASH--IF WE LAND ON THE HOT SIDE WE'LL BURN--IF ON THE COLD SIDE WE'LL FREEZE TO DEATH!

SEE--THERE'S A BELT RUNNING AROUND MERCURY--A TEMPERATE ZONE BETWEEN THE COLD AND HOT SIDES. THAT WOULD SUSTAIN LIFE. ONE SIDE OF THE BELT WILL GRADUALLY TAPER INTO ICE FIELDS--THE OTHER SIDE INTO A BURNING DESERT!



IF WE COULD ONLY START OUR ROCKET-MOTORS, WE COULD LAND THERE. LOOK! THE METEORITES ARE BURNING!



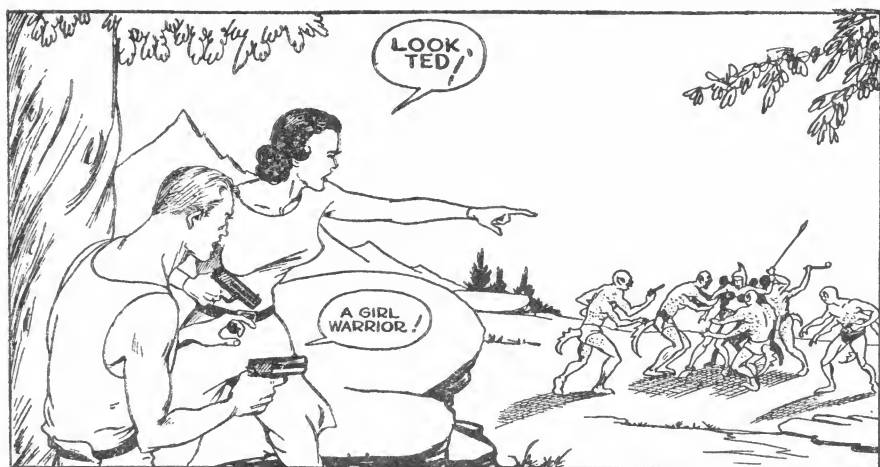
WHY--WHY YOU'RE LANDING OKAY, TED!

YEAH--THE FRICTION OF MERCURY'S AIR SET THE METEORITE AFIRE AND IT BURNED AWAY. I BLASTED THE REMNANTS OUT OF THE ROCKET-TUBE!



TED, WE'RE CUT OFF FROM OUR SPACE-SHIP BY A FOREST FIRE! IT'S SPREADING TOWARD US!

THE METEORITES SET IT ON FIRE. RUN!



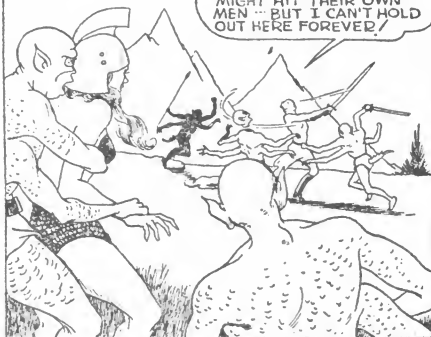
TED'S MUSCLES, TRAINED TO THE HEAVIER PULL OF EARTH'S GRAVITY, CARRY HIM EASILY OVER THE CHARGING REPTILE-MAN.



TED'S SUPERIOR STRENGTH MAKES HIM A MATCH FOR THE REPTILE MEN

BY ALL THE GODS OF MERCURY... A MAN... WHO CAN FIGHT!

THEY CAN'T FIRE THEIR FLAME GUNS... THEY MIGHT HIT THEIR OWN MEN... BUT I CAN'T HOLD OUT HERE FOREVER!



TED IS SAVED BY A CHARGE OF AMAZON WARRIORS

THE AMAZONS!

JUST IN TIME, TOO!



COME ON, GIRLS, WE CAN BEAT THEM!



THE REPTILE-MEN FLED LEAVING MANY DEAD UPON THE FIELD

A MAN...AND SUCH A PHYSICAL SPECIMEN... YOU WILL BE MY HUSBAND!

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, SISTER!

WE'RE PRISONERS TED!



DIANA AND TED ARE MARCHED ACROSS COUNTRY AND PLACED ABOARD A MONO-RAIL CAR. IT ZOOMS TO THE AMAZON CAPITAL CITY

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CITY!

IT IS SARDIS, CAPITAL OF VALIA, CAPTIVE WOMAN!



THEY ARE TAKEN BEFORE XALA, QUEEN OF VALIA.



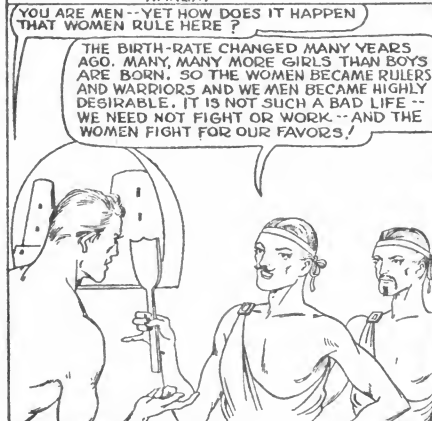
AH--A REAL MAN. YOU WILL BE MY HUSBAND. TRAIN THE GIRL AS A WARRIOR!

HE IS MINE BY RIGHTS! YOU'LL FIGHT ME FOR HIM IN THE ARENA, OH QUEEN!

I HATE TO DO THIS BUT I'LL BE HUSBAND TO NONE OF YOU BLONDES!



TED IS KNOCKED OUT AND COMES TO IN THE QUEEN'S HAREM



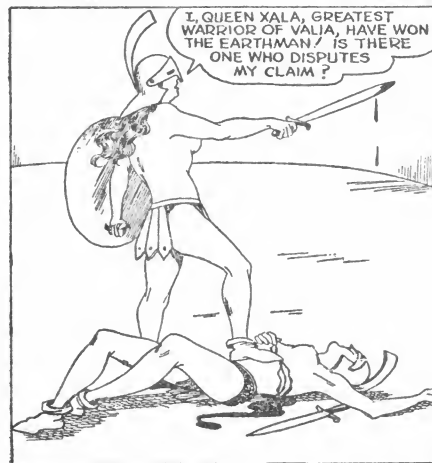
YOU ARE MEN--YET HOW DOES IT HAPPEN THAT WOMEN RULE HERE?

THE BIRTH-RATE CHANGED MANY YEARS AGO. MANY, MANY MORE GIRLS THAN BOYS ARE BORN. SO THE WOMEN BECAME RULERS AND WARRIORS AND WE MEN BECAME HIGHLY DESIRABLE. IT IS NOT SUCH A BAD LIFE--WE NEED NOT FIGHT OR WORK--AND THE WOMEN FIGHT FOR OUR FAVORS!

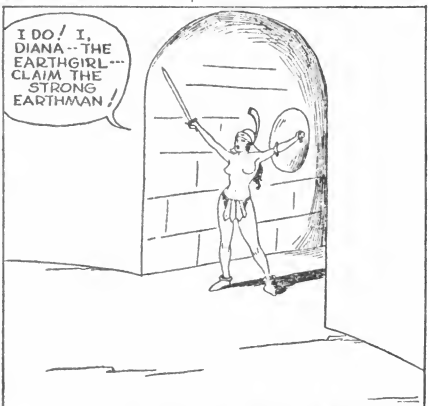
CLOSELY GUARDED, TED WATCHES THE QUEEN BATTLE THE WARRIOR WHO CLAIMS HIM



THIS IS DISGUSTING--IF THERE WERE A CHANCE IN A MILLION OF ESCAPING, I'D DO IT!



I, QUEEN XALA, GREATEST WARRIOR OF VALIA, HAVE WON THE EARTHMAN! IS THERE ONE WHO DISPUTES MY CLAIM?



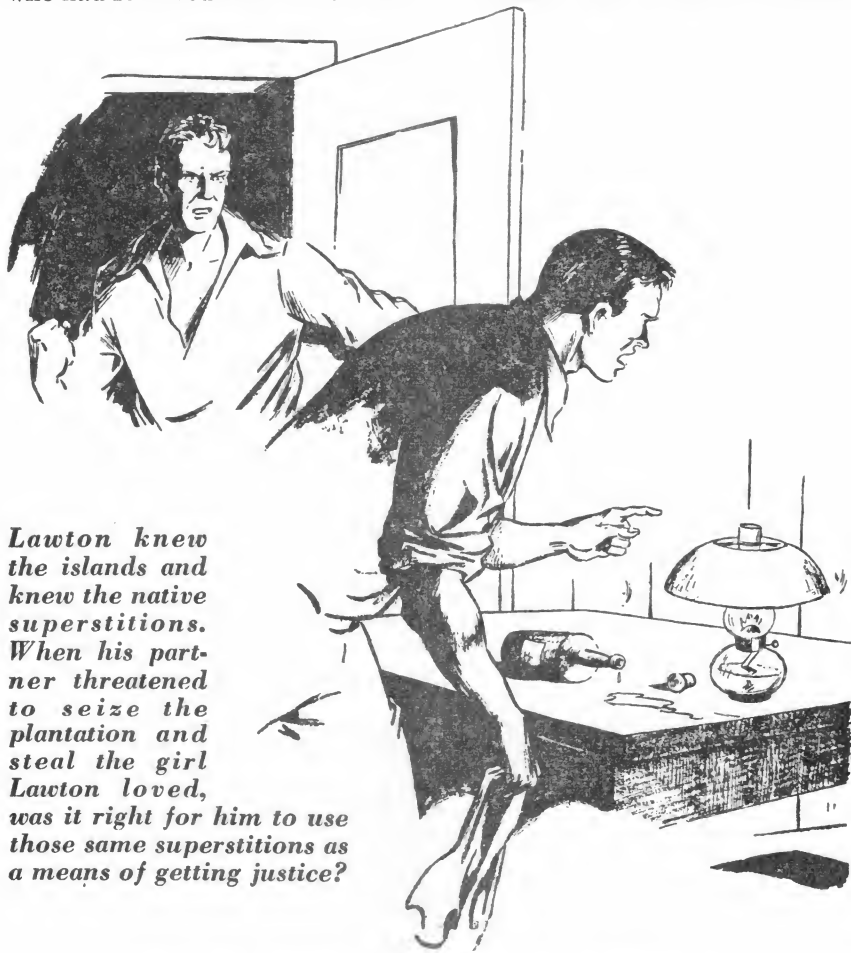
I DO! I, DIANA--THE EARTHGIRL--CLAIM THE STRONG EARTHMAN!

WHAT HAPPENS TO DIANA IN THE ARENA OF SARDIS? SEE THE MARCH ISSUE OF SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES

SOUTH SEA

THE whisper of bare feet on coral strewn sand made "Red" Lawton whirl and reach for the revolver thrust into his sash; but he relaxed when he saw the luscious Marquesan girl who had followed him to the beach.

"The little master," Vikahue said, as though she had guessed why Red had a bad case of jitters, "went over the hill, that way. It is dangerous, if he comes back by night. Some of the way is *tabu*." Vikahue was as tall as Lawton,



Lawton knew the islands and knew the native superstitions. When his partner threatened to seize the plantation and steal the girl Lawton loved, was it right for him to use those same superstitions as a means of getting justice?

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

JUSTICE

and he was no midget in any man's company; she was shapely as all Marquesan girls, generously built, with large eyes, and a crimson smile. All she wore was a *lava-lava*, which reached from hip to knee, and a rayon shawl bound about her breast. Little enough to wear, with her ripe curves; but the overseer's daughter would have been elaborately dressed even without those two garments.

She was tattooed, in the ancient fashion; an intricate blue lacework decorated the pale brown of her thighs, and shaped a girdle for her waist. At first Lawton had thought it was barbarous, but now those tattooed legs fascinated him.

"I was just going out to look for the little master," Lawton answered, frowning a little as he pondered on the chances of his partner's prowling in spots the

"You damn' fool!"
Lawton cried.
"You don't know
what you're
doing."



native devil-doctors said were sacred; Vince Durbin, Lawton's partner, was too cocky and reckless.

Vikahue came closer. Her large eyes were all aglow, and Lawton's heart began to thump; Vikahue had grown up during his five years on the island, and her smile, the luxurious sway of her hips, her very voice told him that she was no longer to be treated as a child. And then she was pressing against him, and one hand ran caressingly down his back.

She was so close that he could see some of the fine blue tracery tattooed on her bosom, and for an instant, he could hardly keep from unwinding the red shawl. Vikahue said, "The little master is not your friend. Sit down, I will tell you."

She sank to the sand, and her clinging weight drew him with her. "Vince Durbin, he walks in the hills, he goes to the holy places, the *tabu* places. The priests will kill him. That will make trouble for you, trouble for my people. The French police will arrest us."

VINCE DURBIN had put up all the cash for the cocoanut plantation which Lawton had developed to full bearing, in the past five years; Durbin had just come from the States. Lawton, though aware of the truth that Vikahue was telling, knew that she had more on her mind than warnings. And then she caught him with both arms, pressed her warm mouth against his, clung to him, ardent and eager.

Those tattooed legs; they had become alluring, a bit more fascinating each day. And now, as the

sun's red rays slanted through the palm trunks, Lawton almost forgot Irinea Salazar, the lovely daughter of the neighboring planter. Almost. . . .

"Viki," He managed to twist free from her supple arms. "Cut it out—you're almost one of the family—I am, I mean—"

"You mean," she cut in, "it's that Salazar girl. She's white, and just back from a school in Paris." Vikahue wasn't angry; she was just sorry. "But listen, Red. The little master goes to see her. She doesn't love either of you."

Vikahue's logic was tempting. But Lawton finally convinced her that while she was as good as Irinea, a white man couldn't get a very nice reception for a native wife, back in the States. "But it'd be nice while it lasted, Red," she urged, and then, though she could not understand his unreasonable scruples, she sighed and went toward the native village.

Lawton was raw boned and angular; he stood there, shaggy brows puckered as he watched Viki's tattooed legs twinkle down the trail. Then he turned to resume his interrupted walk to the pier. Vince Durbin might be snooping around the *Paepae*, the temple platform where a hoard of sacred pearls was supposed to be hidden; but the first place to look was the Salazar plantation.

Lawton started the motor. It backfired, rumbled, then settled down to a steady drumming as the prop bit the water. The next few minutes kept him busy. The reef was a tricky barrier; when the tide was right, the trading boat would clear it, but now, even a launch

required careful handling. He made it without scraping the keel, and he relaxed when she passed the white water and slipped into the smooth swell of the Pacific.

He found Durbin at the Salazar plantation pier, just beyond the towering headland that rose like a fortress. Irinea Salazar and her father were with Durbin.

THE rising moon gilded Irinea's bare shoulders. Though strongly contrasting highlights and shadows blocked out all details of her face, her small, straight nose and the contour of cheek and chin were clearly modeled; her loveliness made Red grope for his tongue.

She wore a dinner gown of pale coral net. The breeze dragged at the skirt, and from knee to bodice, the moon sketched the outline of her shapely figure. There was no island blood in her veins, though since her mother's death, Hernan Salazar had plenty of Marquesan sweethearts. In the same proportion, he kept Irinea under his eye.

Salazar was slender and gray haired. His bow was formal as his greeting. Lawton said to Durbin, "Prowling around at night is dumb. Places along that trail are *tabu*. The natives get griped at such things."

Vince Durbin was tall, but he did not look it beside his partner. His sleek black hair gleamed in the moonlight. His sharp face, not yet tanned by the tropical sun, twisted in a mocking little smile. He gestured at Salazar and the planter's launch, and said, "I was well taken care of, thanks. You didn't have a

date here tonight by any chance, did you?"

Lawton reddened. Before Durbin's arrival, Irinea had expected him whenever he could get away from his plantation.

Salazar and his lovely daughter exchanged glances. The Spanish planter cleared his throat. "Mr. Lawton," he formally began, "Mr. Durbin has asked permission to marry my daughter."

It sounded stagey and absurd, in the free and easy Marquesas, but Salazar carried it off with dignity. Lawton exploded, "That leaves me out, of course! And I guess you're forcing her into it!"

Salazar shrugged and stroked his gray mustache. And when Lawton caught Irinea's eye and saw her smile, half regretful, he knew that she was sorry for him, not for herself.

Durbin cut in, "Now that you're here, let's go! The launch is half mine, after all. Or are you forgetting that I took you off the beach in San Francisco?"

That last quip was too much. Lawton's hard fist lifted Durbin off his feet, laid him on the sand. "This is all mine!" he growled. "How do you like it?"

Irinea cried out in dismay, and knelt beside her groggy suitor.

"I'm okay," Durbin assured her, and sat up.

Irinea turned toward the verandah steps; their good nights were spoken in a way to show that they ignored the clash and the man who opened it. On the way to the launch, Durbin laughed and said, "I was going to tell you about me and her. And you needn't have

come with a gun. Mine's still in my suitcase."

"I'll tell you why I brought it! The French government hasn't enough gendarmes to waste on Ua Paepae. The natives look tame enough to boobs like you, but they're dynamite."

"You told me all that!"

"I'm telling you some more."

Lawton raised his vice above the rumble of the motor. "The trails through the mountains are safe enough by day, but at night, it's something else. Old village sites, ruined temples—they're all *tabu*, and anyone even seeming to monkey around is likely to get speared or clubbed to death."

"So," Durbin sceptically cut in, "You came to Salazar's place."

"Why not? You hadn't taken the boat. I figured you'd been prowling around the old *paepae*, on the back trail to Salazar's. Snooping around to see if there was any truth in those rumors about loot from pearling ships. You've had that on the brain."

"Sure I have! You would too, if you weren't a chump!"

LAWTON realized that there was no arguing with his unpleasant benefactor. When he crossed the tricky reef, and moored the launch at the pier, he demanded, "Why did you take such a sudden notion to come out here and work on the plantation? I was doing pretty well."

Durbin did not answer until they were in the bungalow. There he put his cards on the table. His china blue eyes were cold when he began "You were a bum in Frisco and I staked you. My dough

against your time, fifty-fifty. Now that you've worked your way into a half interest, you want Irinea, too?"

"She's not part of the plantation." Red rose suddenly. "If you're taking her to the States, I'll buy your half of this plantation. From my share of the profits."

Durbin shook his head. "Don't be silly, pal. We may look at Frisco, and then we're coming back. To her plantation and mine."

"So that's it? All right, you buy me out; I'll leave."

"What a chance!" Durbin deliberately lit a cigarette, then looked up, grinning. "I like it here. So does she. A quick look at the States will cure her."

Durbin went to his room, whistling. Lawton had to take that, too. In spite of the evening's bitterness, he could not forget that Vince Durbin had put him on his feet. He stared at his big fists as he sat there; they had betrayed him. Time might give him another chance with Irinea, but not if Durbin rushed her. And Durbin worked fast!

Then Vikahue came softly into the living room. She had a bottle of brandy and glasses, as though she had overhead none of the wrathful clash; but that did not fool Lawton. "Thanks," he said shortly and poured a drink.

But he did not taste it. The shapely Marquesan girl waited, watching him swirl the brandy against the sides of the glass. Finally she came closer and whispered, "He won't last. He doesn't belong here. My father says so, and he knows."



Durbin twisted, the blade held forward, and Lawton couldn't quite avoid the cut.

Lawton flushed; he resented having anyone sorry for him. Then her loyalty touched him. "You better run along," he answered gently.

Viki was too clever to force herself on a man who was disgusted and angry; Lawton knew that, but he knew also that she would bide her time, patiently waiting for tattooed legs, for that shapely, palm-oiled body to tempt him away from any hope of Irinea. Lawton knew, and so he thrust his brandy aside. One drink too many, and he'd follow her to the village.

Having made a spectacle of himself, Lawton could not return to the Salazar plantation to see Irinea. All he could do was wait, stand fast, and resist Vikahue's fascinations. It was not until the trading schooner cleared the bar

and anchored in the lagoon, a few weeks later, that Lawton found an unexpected weapon and fresh hope.

BOTH partners had made their morning rounds; they sat on the verandah, ignoring each other, and watching the pirogue that came skimming across the lagoon. The Marquesan's gleaming body rippled in the sun as he plied his leaf shaped paddle. When he beached his pirogue, he came running up with a bundle of papers for Lawton. There were no letters; no one remembered him in the States. As he ripped open the newspaper wrappers, he decided to cancel his subscriptions. What the hell!

Then he saw an item which must have been front page news about

the time Durbin had flown from San Francisco on the clipper. "*'Shorty' Lane, supposed to be an associate of Vincent Durbin, Los Angeles racketeer, was found dead of bullet wounds along the Embarcadero . . . Police think that this indicates a resumption of the underworld feud which led to the mysterious disappearance of Durbin, some months ago.*"

So that was the background of his partner and benefactor! A racketeer, who had finally taken a powder!

Before Lawton could piece the details together, Durbin was at his side. "Lemme see that rag!" His voice was brusque now. "What's new in the States?"

Durbin's snile was thin and defiant as he plucked the sheet from his partner's hand. He said, "Wise guy, maybe you think you've learned something. Can't make anything of it. I'm not wanted—except by private parties."

Lawton rose. "You did me a good turn, all right. And at the same time, made yourself a hide-out for when it'd get too hot. No wonder you won't buy me out. You're busted, and your racket, whatever it was, is washed up. You're afraid to go back, huh?"

Durbin stood there, arms folded. "The cops don't want me, I told you. Whatta ya doing about it? Spilling to Irinea?"

Lawton laughed harshly. "'If she'd believe me, I would.'"

"Another rat, huh?"

"Call it that. You gave me a lift, and now I'd give you a black eye if I could. Only I can't. I'd give myself a worse one. With her, I mean."

"Don't take it so hard. Hell, if she'd really liked you, it'd been too late for me to cut in."

That hit Lawton between the eyes for a second. Then he flared, "I was waiting until my half of this plantation gave me a start. I didn't build myself up with her, like you did. Do you like her or the Salazar property?"

Durbin was a little more at ease, seeing that Lawton was not going to clean house. "Just between an old tramp and a new one, pal, I like both. I'm getting both. Tell her I'm a retired racketeer. They know how I staked you, so you're sunk, even if you do prove what I am."

"Don't I know it!"

"You don't want to save her from me. Just save her for yourself, which is something else. Hell, I've been a right guy with you."

"That's the tough part of it," Lawton said, very slowly. "If you hadn't been, I could handle this in a lot of ways."

Durbin chuckled and jabbed a derisive finger at the newspaper item. "Not like *he* got, pal. You know it, too. Ain't your style."

The conflict of gratitude and resentment weakened Lawton like a blow in the stomach.

Durbin went on, "Hell, I'm a right guy, and I couldn't help it she likes me. Listen, fellow; as soon as I can I'll buy you out with my cut of the profits of our plantation. Like you were going to buy my share."

Lawton took heart. "I'll stay here and like it," he said. "I'll stay and we'll see who's who."

"You're asking for grief, pal," Durbin retorted. "We'll be gun-

ning each other out. And the French are strict about such things."

But his face had changed perceptibly. He was worried.

IN Ua Paepae he was on his own, and without any henchmen to do his work for him. Lawton sensed that weakness; he was convinced that the sudden offer to buy him out meant that Durbin had been shaken when news from the States reached this isolated island. Lawton pressed his advantage. Durbin had run out once, and he would run out again, under pressure. So give him pressure—now!

"Get your gun, buddy," Lawton quietly said. "I like your idea."

Durbin's jaw sagged. "Huh—you mean—?"

Lawton moved swiftly. A side-step brought him to the cabinet in the corner, and the revolver flickered into view, sitting easily in his big brown hand. Durbin's hands rose. Lawton snapped, "Get your gun. I'll go with you."

"Listen—for God's sake—"

"I never plugged a man in the back. Nor hired one to drill another man. Turn around and walk."

Durbin obeyed. He strode down the hall, fingers closing and opening, nervously. He fumbled when he struck a light to the kerosene lamp. As he reached for the knob of the dresser drawer, he turned, eyeing his partner. "You damn' fool, you can't get away with this!"

"Open the drawer."

As Durbin did so, Lawton's hand flashed out; he scooped up the blued automatic. He nudged

Durbin with the muzzle. "Outside, buddy. I'm keeping this till you're ready for it."

Together they walked down the steps to the sand. The moon was high and white. The breeze now whispered in the palms, and the water rippled, sleepily. Durbin's voice quivered when he demanded, "How far do we stand?"

"This far, big shot." Lawton hurled the gun far out into the water. Once or twice its dark metal glinted in the moon. A bit of phosphorescence marked the spot where it sank. Then he threw his own weapon after it, and said, "That's all there is. We aren't shooting each other, neither in the guts nor in the back."

He stood there, arms folded, as Durbin walked back alone, and a little dizzily. The tough guy had a yellow streak. It was already working. The islands would crack Durbin. But suppose he married Irinea before that happened?

Lawton's next move was to let Durbin take active charge of the plantation. The passive resentment of the natives against a man who did not belong there would make Durbin reveal himself. And that would finally convert Irinea; so Lawton hoped, while he could not tell her, he could make her see and hear.

WHEN Durbin took over the active management of the plantation, that unfinished duel by moonlight showed its effect. Having been shaken by the prospect of a man-to-man encounter, Durbin tried to prove to himself and to his partner that there had been no shock. He would say, "You're too

soft with these big mugs. They're strong as horses. Prod 'em and get some action. Lucky I came along in time to keep them from walking all over you."

He had the big executive manner. Chin stroking, judicious frowning; a good front, too. Lawton shrugged. "I wouldn't, Vince. This isn't a go-getter country. You try it if you want to."

Durbin was not foolish enough to beat or kick the natives, but he cursed them, crowded them. And, sensing his contempt, they bucked him in ways whose result he could see, but he could never pin the responsibility on a man. Copra disappeared. A storage shed mysteriously caught fire. And while making a big show of work, the men soldiered on the job.

The plantation, just ready to make money, began to lose. Durbin knew that he was wrong, and his own bluster rang hollow. He accused Lawton of making trouble, but Lawton said, "I'm losing with you, Vince."

And then Durbin commenced to drink a little too much brandy. Time, and the islands, were dealing justice; but very slowly. And Viki, subtle, smiling, was slowly playing up her advantage.

When Lawton left his partner in the big living room, Viki was waiting in the hall, her brown body agleam with cocoanut oil, her dark hair glistening, a heart stirring fragrance of jasmine exhaling from the blossom behind her ear. Tattooed legs . . . and those sultry, clinging kisses, always with the excuse of telling Lawton, "The little master is losing; that gun you threw in the water will shoot him."

Once he went native, he would lose Irinea, lose what slender chance he still had. For, once he crossed the line, he could not abandon Viki for a white woman. His respect and affection for his native friends began to take the edge from his one weapon against Durbin: waiting for the ex-racketeer to sink himself, exile himself because of his own tactics.

Then Durbin proposed clearing more land, between the edge of the plantation and the foot of the steep slope which was crowned by the *paepae* of cunningly squared volcanic rock. Only the foundation of the holy place remained. Desertion and time had crumbled the *pandanus* timbers of the building that had stood on the high place.

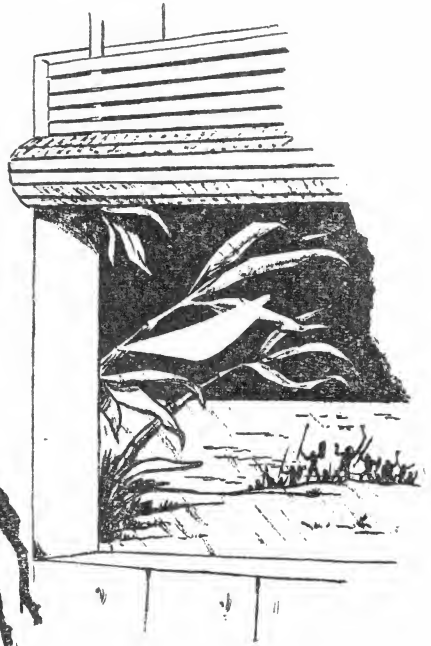
Lawton shook his head. "Nuh-uh. It's *tabu*, coming too close. We'd have hell on our hands. I know you've got a good idea, setting out more trees and cutting them young. Canned palm hearts do bring money, but you're going at it wrong."

"Listen, you weak kneed chump!" Durbin flared. "Do you think this old-time rot still holds? Suppose they did keep their collection of skulls and that sort of tripe up there. If there's any loot from wrecked ships hidden, why don't they spend it for gin?"

THERE were too many laborers at hand, industriously weeding spaces between the tall palms. Some of them understood more English than they admitted. Lawton cut in, "Because it is *tabu*, you fool! You could put a hundred cases of liquor up there and not a

man would dare touch it. A hundred years ago, these lads used to cook and eat birds like you and me, right up there."

He turned and walked away, frowning. Durbin was getting out



"They're crazy, fighting mad!" Lawton said. "Get the shotgun."

of hand; the waiting game was working a bit too well.

Once, Salazar called at the plantation. He looked a little worried. Lawton offered greeting as formal as the old Spaniard's, and withdrew, leaving him with Durbin.

Salazar's eyes contradicted his smile when he finally descended from the verandah, to board his launch. Durbin looked perplexed. Whatever advice he had received, it must have been hard to digest.

"Salazar," Lawton told himself, "is trying to help Vince. They're still for him."

He was wondering how long he

could endure Durbin's daily calls on Irinea. He had built this plantation with his own hands; inaction tormented him. She would soon marry Durbin, and still Lawton could not speak a word or lift a hand.

Each day, Lawton learned why military men say that troops who can advance and attack under fire are much easier to find than soldiers who can stand fast under punishment, taking and not giving. But he never allowed himself more than two sundown drinks, and of an evening, he walked up and down the beach.

These walks had a result that the most clever schemer could not have anticipated. It was late when he returned one night, but there was light in the front windows. "That bottle. Is he hitting it?"

Lawton had to know. Feeling himself cracking under fire, he had to see how his enemy endured. He needed some outside strength, for his own was failing. Too often, he had stepped to the launch, intending to go to the Salazar plantation to tell his story; damn himself, to save Irinea.

Lawton swiftly retraced his steps. He tiptoed, in long reaching strides, though there was no need of stealth until he came close to the verandah. Better, slip up the slope, where the windows were eye level. He dug into the rich volcanic earth of the knoll that supported the rear of the bungalow.

Then he heard the scream. A woman's voice shook the tin roof. Glass shattered as Lawton reached the crest, and a man snarled, "Shut up, you damn'—! What—listen—you—ooooow!"

LAWTON burst in from the rear. He cleared the kitchen. As he entered the hall, he saw what he had expected, there in the indirect light from the living room.

Durbin's white duck out-lined him in the half gloom. Vikahue's brown skin reflected golden highlights as she screamed and struggled. If the light had been better, Lawton could have caught tattooed patterns he had never seen. She had shed her *lava-lava*, and the scarf that bound her breast was trailing, and so was her long gleaming hair.

"You damn' fool!" Lawton yelled. He caught Durbin by the shoulder. "If you have to make passes at a gal, pick one that likes you!"

Durbin whirled. He gasped, "That tramp's as big as I am—do you think I'd try—I tell you, she asked for it—she damn' near smothered me with both arms—and then yelled her head off!"

Vikahue fled. Servants were upsetting things in the kitchen. Lawton turned to them and raised one hand. "Go back. Everything is well."

They obeyed, but as they left, they began giggling and chattering. Though Durbin could understand only a few words, his face and ears were red.

"Listen, I'm no pig, and I didn't know she was yours."

"She's not mine. If you're telling the truth, and maybe you are, it's just too bad. You've made a show of yourself."

Lawton was certain that Vikahue had staged an act; a trick to discredit Durbin. Had she been genuinely frightened, she would have clung to her rescuer, but she had avoided this, to avoid putting Lawton in the false position of fighting about a native woman.

With shaking hand, Durbin poured a drink. He flinched under Lawton's appraising eye, misunderstanding what was behind it. "Uh—oh, all right. Here's exactly the way it was, so help me. I'd had a couple too many. She was pouring them, and getting closer every time. Jeez, I'm just human, ain't I? Sure I made a pass, but I wasn't—uh—getting rough."

Lawton said, "Skip it and watch

your step. The natives love gossip."

Durbin squirmed. "I never heard of a dame out here squawking."

"They don't. They're easy, and making a pass don't break any bones. Her screeching is what gives you a black eye. The whole damn' island is wondering why she would scream instead of smiling. Wondering and laughing."

Durbin could not endure the whispers, the glances that he could feel from the rear. Wits had always served him, but the heat that Ua Paepae turned on him was immune to cleverness. Lawton wondered what his partner was planning.

WHEN he found out, it was too late. That was one afternoon when Durbin was not at the bungalow; the launch, however, was at the pier. The servants were strangely silent. Lawton at first blamed that on the afternoon heat. There had been a stifling sultriness, and fitful gusts, chilly and twisting. The peculiar smell of the air had promised a storm; perhaps, sensing it, the natives were alarmed. But Lawton was not sure that this guess was right, that this accounted for the tension that he felt.

And Vikahue was not about the house. Another odd note. He sat there, frowning and moodily smoking. Trouble was in the air, lurking but certain.

Later he heard the familiar sound of a launch. He went down to the beach, expecting Salazar. He was surprised to see the planter's daughter. Irinea was too agitated for the meeting to be embarrassing. As she lurched from the boat,

he caught her by both arms; it was as a meeting of strangers, and when she recovered her balance, he let go her hands.

"Your father sent you to warn me of a specially tricky storm?" Lawton groped, nudging her elbow and turning toward the bungalow. "He's not sick is he?"

"No. It's not the storm. It's Vince. Where is he?" She caught his arm and he could feel her nails through his sleeve. "Where?"

Lawton shook his head. "I thought your father might have called here and picked him up, while I was making my rounds."

She sank to the verandah steps. "Oh, then it must be true!"

"What?" He jerked upright. "What's true?"

"What the servants were whispering. That he's gone to the *paepae* to look for the pearls that are supposed to be there."

"That's bad."

"Red, I've been terrible to you, but I couldn't help it. One can't, you know."

"That's all right, honey. You want me to find him?"

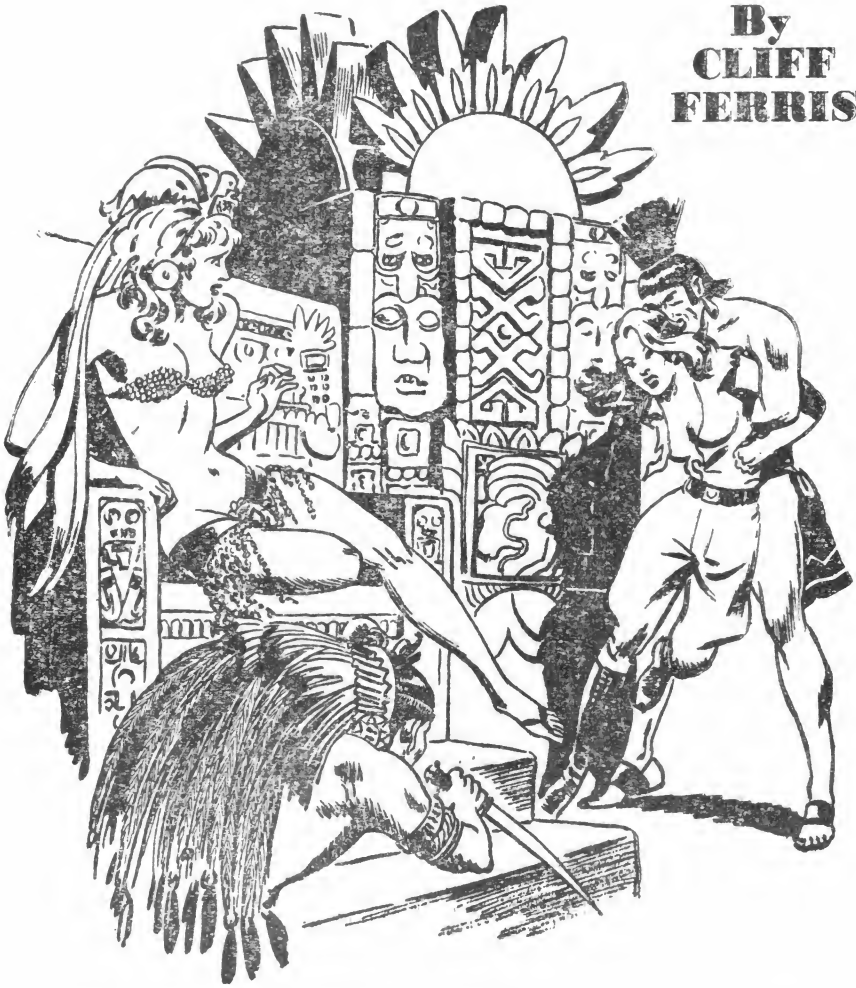
"Father doesn't know, and he mustn't, or he would go. And he's not strong enough for—" She shivered. "For trouble. Will you —? I hate to ask."

"Vince did me a favor once. And he's a white man. And you want it. There reasons."

The wind was freshening. No stars could reach through blackness that blocked the sky, and the reef was now a long white line. There was no telling whether this was a passing squall, or the forerunner of a storm. Irinea's dress

(Continued on page 101)

By
**CLIFF
FERRIS**



"I shall make you Emperor of the World," she told him, and, in spite of his love for Lea, he was tempted by what she showed him from the top of the temple

WHEN first they glimpsed the granite tower through the leaves, the fleeing man and girl thought they had been maneuvered into a trap by the howling savages. Then, sensing the stillness of the vast pile, realiz-

ing that no flat-nosed Indians lay in wait for them there, they felt a stirring of hope.

A spear hissed between them as they ran, its bamboo shaft touching Dick Dorrance's cheek. He gasped, "Too close!" and thrust Lea Sands behind the thick bole of a mahogany tree, flattened himself beside her and swung out his revolver.

Naked brown men melted into jungle gloom as the .45 yammered twice and leaden slugs skittered

TEMPLE OF ETERNITY



The sprawling warrior fell directly between the strands of golden wire.

through underbrush. The hammer clicked on a spent shell and Dick fumbled in his pocket for the half-dozen extra cartridges he had been wise enough to bring from the camp of the Courtney Archeological Expedition.

Lea brushed curling strands of chestnut hair from hazel eyes. "If only we knew what they had

against us!" she cried. "The natives of this part of Yucatan are supposed to be friendly!" Her small breasts rose and fell stormily beneath her khaki blouse. In boots and torn jodhpurs, with a sun helmet awry over her more-than-pretty face, she looked tiny and scared.

Dick was beginning to suspect

the answer, and it had something to do with the huge Mayan pyramid rising there in the center of a broad circular pavement. He surveyed it with quick glances when his eyes were not searching the shadows for the brown men who had harried them these last three miles with spears and angry yells.

"They might have been trying to keep us from this very place," he muttered. "Maybe we've stumbled on something sacred, something that would be called *tabu* in Africa. Two or three times they tried to head us off."

Lean, dark-haired, nearing thirty, Dick Dorrance stood six feet in his laced boots and whipcord garments, which the thorny undergrowth had cut to ribbons. His craggy face was worried as he thumbed his last cartridges into the gun's cylinder. This was not his first brush with danger—as a field man for a Chicago museum he had hunted the secrets of vanished civilizations in many perilous parts of the world—but it was the first time he had faced death beside a girl.

Moreover, this was the girl he intended to marry. Lea had joined the expedition as an expert on Mayan hieroglyphs, and they had fallen in love the day they met in New Orleans with other members of the group to sail for Yucatan. Together they had helped explore ruins of temples and pyramids lost for centuries in the tropical jungles, and at dawn today they had set out to hunt for other evidences of the culture of the strange people which was already dying when Columbus found the New World.

It appeared that they had found

something, all right—but whether they would live to tell about it was questionable. . . .

Lea asked, "What do we do now, Dick?"

"We get out of this damned brush and into the open," he said. "Maybe they won't dare leave the woods, but if they do I can see what I'm shooting at."

HE peered once more into the shadows, seeing that no savage lurked near enough to throw a spear effectively, and took her hand. Together they raced through the remaining few yards of undergrowth and across blocks of smooth stone so cunningly joined that no blade of grass showed between them. They ran a hundred yards without hearing a yell or a footstep other than their own, and paused.

"Look!" she panted. "They *are* afraid to follow!"

He saw the Indians, twenty or more of them, watching silently from the edge of the paved area. They had abandoned the chase, at least for the present. For some reason they had no desire to approach that mass of gleaming stone.

Dick frowned. "One of the natives at camp was claiming that the ghosts of the old Mayan rulers inhabit these parts and are guarded by a tribe of fierce warriors. I didn't pay much attention, Lea—you know how they garble those legends—but now I wonder if we've found the home of the spooks, and if those were the guards who chased us!"

For the first time he could give his whole attention to the monu-

mental structure, and there was wonder and incredulity in his mind as he did so. Flat-topped and geometrically perfect, it rose far above the jungle that walled it in, larger than any pyramid discovered outside Egypt. It was no scrubby hill, overgrown with vegetation, like those pyramids the expedition had already excavated; this one seemed to have been untouched by the ages.

From its summit rose a startling device, unlike anything he had ever encountered in the Americas. It was a straight shaft supporting a horizontal disc of burnished metal, surmounted by a pierced upright. It resembled nothing so much as the *ankh*, the tau cross with the loop at the top, called the Key of Life—as potent a symbol to the ancient Egyptians as the Feathered Serpent of Quexacoatl had been among the Mayans.

Lea breathed, "The sign of immortality! Only that disc is like a concave mirror, upside down. . ."

"We might as well keep going," he said. "We don't want anything to do with those bloodthirsty devils. Maybe we can build a fire on top of the thing and signal for help."

They crossed the pavement to the first of the three-foot granite steps that mounted a hundred feet upward. He climbed ahead, pausing on each successive step to give her his hand and pull her up beside him. It was gruelling work under the high sun.

Gaining the summit, exhausted, they found a stone floor lower than the top of the walls. There was a thin strip of shade at one side, and after making sure the Indians had

not left the jungle, they sat down.

Lea lay against him limply. "Only for a moment, though, and then she cried, "Dick, the pyramid is trembling!"

He laughed, hugging her. "That's me, darling—scared and tired, but tingling with the excitement of being alone with you!"

He wasn't joking altogether. The thrill of holding her in his arms was speeding his pulse. Even the wonder of this find in the heart of the wilderness could not compete with the more primitive wonder of love. He saw the thrust of her young breasts against her blouse, the exquisite curves of ivory peeping through rents in the jodhpurs, and it was hard to think of anything else.

"Let's never go back," he whispered.

She moved, twisting her body so that her breasts were cushioned on his chest. Their lips met in clinging bliss. Her eyes brimmed with emotions more ancient than any culture of a dead race, and her breath was warm on his cheek. Her beauty sang in Dick's veins, filled his heart and brain, intoxicated him.

Their arms and lips and broken words merged into ecstasy. . . .

THE sun, rising toward its zenith, narrowed the line of shade. Rested, no longer breathless, Dick became gradually aware of a vibration so faint he sensed rather than felt it.

He said "You were right, after all, darling. It's moving!" He thought of electrical dynamos—the vibration was somehow reminis-

cent of a power plant—but the notion was too fantastic.

She nodded. "I wondered whether you'd notice, dear. I was afraid I was imagining things."

He looked at the lofty symbol—the Key of Life—with new interest. Could it be a part of a machine dating from the far times when the Mayans were supposed to have developed a great science? In some unexplained way, not by manpower alone, they had brought these blocks of stone, weighing as much as a thousand tons, a hundred miles from the coast through the jungle.

The shaft of the Key was of squared stone, and at a height of about ten feet was the sacred rayed symbol representing the sun, ringed with hieroglyphs.

"Maybe you can read them, Lea. Let me lift you up."

He put his hands on her waist and raised her effortlessly until she sat upon his shoulder, soft and warm and light as a child. She grasped the stone, steadying herself. . . .

Under the the pressure of her arms the Key began to turn!

"Look out!" she screamed, sliding down. "The floor, Dick!"

He heard the groaning of wheels that had not turned in ages. He saw a section of stone before him shudder and lift, and then discovered that all the platform was swinging back in sections like a series of trapdoors hinged against the walls, leaving only the small square space in the center where he and Lea clung together.

The Key of Life, turned in an ancient lock, was opening the prya-

mid and leaving them marooned over a black void.

Lea said almost hysterically, "They're made of gold!"

The sections had lifted far enough so that their bottom surfaces were visible, and those surfaces were covered with a bright yellow metal, paler than gold. An alloy, he supposed. . . .

And then one mystery was cleared up, for suddenly the burnished bottom of the disc overhead took on a dazzling brilliance. Almost blinded by the rays that showered from it, Dick understood that the hinged sections had tipped back until their metallic plating caught the sun's rays and flung them against the concave mirror.

Turning his eyes downward, he found the space beneath no longer a black void. The twice-reflected sunlight poured into the interior of the pyramid and was reflected over and over again from a floor and walls of the yellow metal. He glimpsed a vast chamber filled with golden light, and leading into it, a stairway winding about the shaft of the Key, which descended to the bottom.

The vibration was a distinct humming now, more than ever like the sound of electrical machinery.

Such fear as he had felt—not for himself, but for Lea—was swept aside by excitement. He urged her toward the stairs.

"We're going down," he said. "We're going to see what no living person has ever seen. Darling, you'll be famous!"

She corrected him. *We'll* be famous!"

It didn't matter; they were practically one person, anyway. . . .



A spear slammed into a tree as they ran.

THE golden light increased as they descended, bathing them in its warm glow. The air was fresh and scented subtly with some unfamiliar perfume. The hum of machinery grew louder. Dick felt invigorated, as he had often felt in power plants, where high-frequency current made the nerve-ends tingle.

They reached the foot of the stairs and stood upon a metal platform in the center of a square hall whose walls rose straight for forty

feet and then narrowed. The machinery—it could be nothing else—was directly beneath their feet. All around, above and below, the shining metal reflected sunlight, except where an eight-foot margin along the bottom of the walls was faced with what appeared to be ground glass.

Dick was vaguely disappointed to find the chamber empty, save for the machinery casing upon which they stood. The men who had built this stronghold should

have hidden their treasures here, their sacred images and works of art. Perhaps in secret rooms—

"I can see through the walls!" Lea cried.

It was no exaggeration. What had resembled ground glass was beginning to resemble clear glass. Under the bombardment of light rays a gray vapor was lifting from it.

Dick sprang from the platform to the floor, pulling Lea with him. He rushed to one side of the chamber and saw what he thought were coffins behind the transparency, ranged in rows. Then, as visibility increased, a sense of awe came over him, for they were cushioned shelves, upon each of which lay the body of a bronzed warrior in full barbaric regalia, with sword and spear beside him. The shelves were in tiers of three, crowding a gallery two hundred feet long. At least two hundred bodies lay motionless along this side of the pyramid, he estimated.

Bodies? They might be images. No perfection of the embalmer's art could keep corpses so lifelike through the centuries. The Egyptians had known how to preserve the bodies of their dead, but their finest specimens had never given the illusion of life.

He looked at the metal ornaments around their arms and ankles, and saw golden wires attached to them—wires which were gathered into cables at the foot of each tier and passed into conduits sunk in the floor, exactly like the two elements of an electrical circuit!

He squeezed Lea's arm so tightly that she winced. "We've found

something really big!" he said exultantly.

Feeling the throb of machines that must have been in motion thousands of years, he could almost believe that these swarthy warriors still lived!

He walked along the side of the chamber with Lea trailing silently. They came to the adjoining wall, and there, in the same formation, lay copper-skinned girls with slender limbs and firm breasts cupped in golden shells. They wore circlets of jewels in their dark hair, embroidered skirts that ended above their knees, and sandals. Seeing the golden wires attached to their ankles and wrists, Dick had the uncanny feeling that they, too, were alive.

Behind the transparent section of the next wall were other warriors, like the first ones, tall and sinewy.

"These," said Lea, "must have been members of what is called the Older Race, the tall people who ruled the Mayans."

Dick had already arrived at that conclusion. Ethnologists knew from skeletons found in the burial places that the Mayans were round-headed, short and sturdy; but rare evidence had been found of a taller people with longer skulls, who were believed to have been the real creators of the culture that flourished and crumbled in Central and South America before the time of Columbus.

"These were rulers, all right," he declared, pointing.

They had come to the fourth wall, where the arrangement was different. Instead of the long gallery, a number of small individual

chambers lay behind the transparent substance, and in each lay a single figure clad in garments threaded with gold. They wore headgear crested with the Feathered Serpent and engraved over the brow with the Key of Life.

Dick had reached the middle of this fourth wall, and there he stopped dead, gazing upon a spectacle that left him speechless.

"She—she must have been their empress, Dick—or their goddess," Lea whispered.

Empress or goddess, it did not matter in that unreal moment. All he knew or cared was that he was gazing at the most beautiful girl he had ever seen or dreamed of.

UNLIKE the others, she did not recline, but sat in a larger chamber upon a canopied throne raised above the floor level—a throne of solid gold, lined with cushions of deep purple. Against the dark background her slender figure seemed to be all gold: her skin was not bronze, but the color of the sun; her hair fell over her shoulders, wave upon yellow wave; her eyes were closed, but he had the thought that if she opened them they would be golden, too.

Upon her head was a tall helmet bearing the Key of Life for crest, with the Mayan serpent twined about it. Across her virginal breasts were webs of jewels that adorned without concealing. Her girdle was a belt of gold with a jeweled buckle, and from it depended strings of precious stones, forming a tiny apron. Except for sandals upon her small feet, those things were all she wore.

Being a woman, Lea was less

deeply impressed by the vision. Lea whispered, "She must have been glorious."

"Not 'must have been,' " he said. "Darling, *she is!* She's breathing, living!"

It was true. The gems upon her breast glittered as breath stirred her bosom, and her eyelids fluttered. . . .

A thin whimper came from Lea's throat. "Dick, I'm afraid!"

There was a footstep behind them. Dick whirled, the short hairs at the base of his skull prickling. His hand started toward his revolver, but he stayed it when he saw it was too late.

The blade of a spear was poised six inches from his throat and a warrior stood ready to deliver the death-thrust. Other warriors with spears and clubs, and some armed only with short metal rods, surrounded them, and from the galleries at both sides more were coming. The transparent partitions had disappeared into the floor and men were arising from the couches where they had slept through generations.

In their glaring eyes Dick saw distrust and hatred. Fear came leaping over him as he thought of Lea's lovely body run through by spears, hacked by swords, subjected to unspeakable tortures.

And he was helpless. Even had there been time to use his revolver, what good were six bullets against the four or five hundred men massing around the circular stairway?

"We're friends," Dick said, knowing the words were futile because they would not be understood.

A man, apparently an officer,

pushed his way through the crowd and put a question in a harsh and unfamiliar tongue. Dick could only shrug his shoulders.

The officer issued a command. A warrior came forward with leather thongs in his hands. He directed Dick by signs to turn, with his arms behind him, and be bound.

There was nothing else to do. Dick saw the stark terror in Lea's face and murmured, "Steady, darling. They'll probably be grateful to us when they find out we brought them back to life."

Then his glance went to the throne where the empress or goddess sat, and when he looked at her he forgot all else.

NO WALL was between them now. She was awake and she was gazing at him, and her eyes were golden, as he had known they would be. They glowed with a strange light. They spoke to him—or perhaps it was her mind that spoke through some perfection of telepathy—and he found himself mentally recalling all the events that had happened to him that day, and knew that his thoughts were apparent to her.

The golden girl smiled. She spoke, commanding the warriors. They fell back, leaving Dick and Lea alone before the throne.

"Dick Dorrance," said the girl, "you will forgive my guards. They thought you intended to harm me."

He gasped, "You speak our language!"

"That is simple. I have looked into your mind and it has told me what words you will understand."

Lea's bewilderment was as great as his own. But, being feminine,

Lea was not to be dazzled by feminine charms, and being a scientist, Lea was curious.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Why have you slept in this place, and how long, and for what purpose?"

The smile faded from the girl's face, but her voice was gentle.

"You have a right to ask. I am Kalma, princess of Maya, destined to be empress when I have chosen an emperor to reign with me. I am the ruler of Maya and shall be ruler of the world under Quexacoatl, who was called the sun-god Ra by the Egyptians and Sar in Atlantis.

"In this temple the hour of Maya's greatest glory has been perpetuated. You would say that hour was two thousand years ago, but you would be wrong, for we have made time stand still. The twenty centuries your people have counted since then have been as a dream and will be blotted out swiftly.

"Our wise men know the future as well as the past. They foresaw the evil days that would come upon our empire, bringing death and destruction. With a science greater than your civilization could understand—a science of physics and metaphysics wedded—they planned to survive the cycle."

"They cheated fate!" Dick murmured rapidly.

Her smile returned. "In a manner of speaking. They built this pyramid where no one would be apt to find it until the danger was past, and charged a tribe of savages with the task of guarding it. They made the walls so strong that no tools of the invading Spaniards could have opened it, even had they killed the guards and discovered us by accident. Until a few years ago it



"Tell me you love me," she demanded. He couldn't turn away.

was locked securely by a time device. The Key would not have opened it.

"Here I and my court have remained suspended in timelessness. The generator in this chamber and the time machinery in its four corners have been energized by sunlight penetrating the stones outside. Those machines create a force beside which your electricity is

coarse and crude—a force which can control the illusion of time and make a moment eternal, and expand that moment to cover the whole earth.

"When you opened the pyramid, the inner walls of radioactive metal were charged directly with sun-energy. The machines were speeded, the force was increased, and we awoke. We went to sleep on the

last day of our year 10410, according to the reckoning of Sar, and now that we have awakened it is still that day. Reckoning by your calendar, you would call it April 21, 88 B. C."

Spellbound as he was, Dick could not credit all that this radiant being told him. He said, "How can you know about the Spaniards who conquered your people, and about our calendar and our electricity?"

"Did I not say that our wise men could penetrate the dimensions of time and forecast the future? Your modern history was written in our books before the beginning of the Christian era. If I wish to learn more, your thoughts are as clear to me as writing on a wall."

He felt uncomfortable, convinced against his will. "I hardly know what to say, princess. . . ."

"Soon you shall call me 'empress.'" She arose, her lithe body swaying. "Come and see proof of what I have told you."

SHE moved toward the stairway. Turning, he saw that the people who gave way respectfully before her included not only the warriors, but the firm-breasted maidens who had slept opposite the throne and the gorgeously robed personages who had occupied more dignified couches in their separate chambers.

He caught a glimpse of Lea, her face anxious, her eyes resentful. He tried to reassure her. "Don't worry," he said.

But he couldn't help worrying, himself.

Kalma mounted the winding stairs effortlessly. Behind and beneath her, Dick watched the ripple

of muscles under her satin skin and reflected that beauty such as this had been lost to the world, together with the art and Science that had made this Temple of Eternal Life possible. The scientist within him regretted the latter, but the man yearned toward her loveliness. . . .

She gained the little platform at the summit and waited for him. She turned the Key by means of the branch Dick had thrust through the shaft. Slowly, ponderously the mirrored sections of the roof closed.

He thought of Lea, imprisoned below with the resurrected ancients. He asked, "Won't it be dark down there?"

"No. The walls will continue to reflect light for many hours. Our cities were made largely of that metal, which has a miraculous affinity for the sun, and there was sunlight in the streets all night."

Her glance swept the horizon and came back to him. There was an incongruous touch of shyness in her manner.

"The girl Lea Sands is in love with you?"

He nodded. "And I'm in love with her. We're going to be married when we get home."

A curious expression came over her face. "You will never have any other home but Maya. She will never be your bride. I brought you here to tell you that because I had no wish to hurt her. You are going to be Maya's emperor."

It took him a minute to absorb the shock. "But I—I—"

"Listen, Dick Dorrance," she said softly. "Before I entered the temple I made a pact with my gods.

I knew no man whom I wished to rule beside me. I promised that I should take for my mate the one who should find and open the pyramid, and in return for certain sacrifices the gods were to see that he should make a fitting emperor. The gods have kept their bargain. I am pleased with you."

"But Lea—"

"She shall have riches and power. She may choose a husband from among our finest men."

He inquired, "Do you think love is set aside so easily?"

"What is love compared to my wishes? I am Maya's ruler and shall be the world's ruler." She made an imperious gesture. "It is for me to say what shall be done, not you. I could have you tortured until you chose to obey, or I could sacrifice her by fire to the gods." She smiled. "But there will be no need of that. You say you do not love me, but I can change your mind."

"I think not."

"Then I shall have to demonstrate," She stood with head thrown back, the jewels upon her moving breasts bright in the sunlight. Her eyes were pools of mystery, her radiance more than human.

"Love me," she commanded.

His words of protest would not be uttered. His will crumbled before her arrogant dominance. He wavered.

"Love me, Dick Dorrance."

He took a step toward her—and was lost. His hands reached for her nude shoulders and slid to the curving circumference of her waist. With the thrilling contact came irresistible longing. The fire of the

sun entered into his veins and was enhanced by the fire of her supple body, arching like a golden flame against him. His mouth sought her red lips and her kisses burned.

"Kalma," he said brokenly. "Kalma. . . ."

"Tell me you love me."

"I love you, Kalma."

She twisted out of his embrace with a tinkling laugh of triumph. "You see? There is no escape. But never fear, we shall be happy. Your Lea will find happiness in time, too. You shall live in a world more glorious than you ever guessed a world could be. Come here and see the rebirth of that world."

He stood at the low wall of the platform and looked toward the encircling wall of the jungle, where last he had seen the Indians who had attacked him descendants of the tribesmen charged two thousand years ago with the guardianship of the Temple of Eternal Life. An exclamation came unbidden to his lips.

The jungle was melting away!

WHERE the tangle of trees and vines had been was a spaced and cultivated grove of fruit trees, bright with blossoms. Past the grove an aery shimmering of yellow solidified as he watched and became a tower of metal. Beyond the tower appeared another, and the wavering outlines of other buildings, large and small.

All at once there were glittering warriors at the base of the first tower, a hundred or more of them, marching in formation.

"It is the city of Xalo," said Kalma proudly. "It is my capital and

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Indigo Island

(Continued from page 17)

smelled the sweat-stained horse.

Instinct of danger, rather than any sound, made Shane swerve. A form hurtled against him out of the dark, and a fist jarred his shoulder. There was the gleam of a dagger in that fist, but it had passed over Shane's shoulder. As Shane leaped back, another form hurtled out of the dark, and flung itself upon his assailant. Shane heard a groan, and saw the man drop, writhing in his death-agony, a dagger in his back.

"It's all right, Burton," called Hewlett's voice.

Shane stepped forward, clutching the automatic in his pocket. The dead man was Fang, lying in a widening pool of blood. Standing over him was squat Machado; it was he who had struck the blow, not Hewlett.

"No, no, Burton, you are not in danger," Hewlett jeered. "Captain Machado has just saved your life. I am merely the innocent on-looker. But it doesn't pay to play a lone hand on Indigo Island, nor to be interested in the ladies of Mr. Li's harem. Romance is very dangerous, Burton.

"You fool, why haven't you opened up? Li has discovered our plans, and our lives are worth about five minutes' purchase if we stay here. Come along, Burton!"

THE crash of thunder, the swish of rain, and then, suddenly, from the sea end of the gardens, the crackle of rifle-fire

and the confused clamor of voices. Shane heard Camille scream somewhere, and ran toward the place from which her cry came. Then Barron burst through the hedge, with half-a-dozen blue-clad soldiers at his heels, and in his arms Camille, fighting like a wild-cat.

Hewlett roared with laughter. "Good for you, Barron!" he shouted. "Bring her along! Come, Burton!"

Shane had to keep his head, he told himself as he followed Hewlett, Machado, and Barron, clutching the struggling, screaming girl. A battle seemed to be in progress at the foot of the gardens, though the rain and the thunder drowned the sound of the firing. In a few moments Shane found himself at the entrance to the tunnel, near the warehouses, that led into the fort. A dozen soldiers had taken charge of Camille, and were forcing her along.

Beyond the tunnel, Shane found himself inside the fort, with its sheds and buildings, and open ground flanked by earthworks, extending down to the sea. A troop of soldiers were dragging out a field-piece. An electric light was shining from a long, one-story house.

Hewlett and Shane followed the rest inside. It was a guard-house, with a table and benches, and a door at the end. Four soldiers, fully armed, were standing to attention. Hewlett turned to Shane with his mocking smile.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you to open up, my friend," he said. "*What did they do with Burton?*"

He went on, "No, I thought at first you might be Burton. But Burton was a drunk, and you're not. Burton handled his knife and fork in the English way—he'd picked that up in Shanghai. You see, we're not quite dumb, Mr.—er—Burton!

"Well, Burton, or whatever your real name is, we knew that the real Burton had been killed. Han Mow was to send a substitute. We were supposed not to know. But I don't trust you, and I'm going to hold you till the fighting is over, and then you'll sail as Burton and certify to the indigo. You've nothing to be afraid of, and we'd rather not have you accidentally killed in the fighting. Oblige me by walking through that doorway—Burton!"

Shane looked at Camille, standing helpless under the bayonets of the soldiers. "I'm damned if I will!" he said.

His fist shot out, but Hewlett wasn't there. Something dropped on Shane's head, and he went tumbling into a pit of darkness.

THE sound of a dull concussion brought him back to consciousness. Another, and then another. This must be Hankow, for those were cannon-shots! But suddenly the links of memory snapped back into place.

Two guns were answering each other. Captain Foo's gun answering Machado's!

Shane got upon his feet and groped forward in the darkness. He found a stone wall, traced it

around its perimeter. He was in a cell. There was a door, but not a chink of light came through.

A long time passed, during which Shane could hear the guns firing steadily. Now and again he thought he heard the faint crackle of firearms. He had hurled himself against the door again and again, without the least result. When the lock clicked suddenly, and the door opened, Shane was lying exhausted on the stone floor.

A figure slipped into the cell. In the faint light that came from without, Shane recognized the Chinese girl.

As he sprang to his feet, she clung to him, warm and supple. She was trembling. She seemed like a young girl in her first transports of love. This child couldn't be old Li's concubine. But that thought flashed through Shane's mind and was gone as he followed the girl through the empty guard-room, into the outer court. No one seemed to be near them, but the crack of the rifles still came from the direction of the gardens, and the guns were still challenging each other. Shane heard the plashing of the sea, and discovered that they were at the water-end of the fort. The rain was drizzling down.

Two sentries came into view, shouted and came running forward with leveled rifles. Shane felt for his automatic; of course it was gone.

He made a perfect dive, caught the nearer of the two men about the knees and brought him down. As the second rifle roared, he snatched away the first man's weapon and brought the stock



The two sentries came running ~~in~~ like
men gone mad.

down on his skull. The man behind him fired again, the slug nipped Shane's cheek; but now Shane had his rifle in his hands. The sentry, a wiry Anamese, fought stoutly. The rifle roared again. Then Shane got it and didn't hesitate in what he had to do. The sentry dropped, shot through the forehead.

Shane heard a cry behind him. Camille was standing near him, bending over the body of the Chinese girl. The sentry's last shot had pierced her heart, and she was already in the throes of death.

Camille ran to Shane, caught him by the hand, and pointed upward. They raced through the scrub beside the fort. Now they were above the sunken interior, and Shane saw that all the waterfront was ablaze, including one end of the freighter, though she was still replying to Machado's gun.

Camille cried, "I rode to Taglu, chief of the hill village, and he has promised to bring aid. I knew what was coming, because I lured Hewlett on for weeks, until I had confirmed my own suspicions, and Li's. There was nothing between us. I swear it. That poor girl was working for us. She got the key from a guard who was her lover. She gave herself and her life for Li. I knew you would be with us."

"I'm with you," said Shane.

THEY raced around the aloe hedge, under a storm of bullets from Machado's men and the servants of Li, who were still putting up a stubborn resistance in

the gardens. Suddenly the night was rent with a terrific roar. A blast of flame, a mighty sheet of fire spread half-way over the horizon. Black against that flame, they saw the remnants of Captain Foo's freighter hurled skyward.

Camille, leading the way, ran down a sunken path beside the bungalow. She stopped before an iron door and pressed a lever somewhere. Swiftly and silently the door opened before them; swiftly and silently it closed again. In front of him Shane saw a large windowless room, illuminated by oil lamps swung by gilt chains from the roof.

Inside, the Chinese girls were huddled. There was another door beyond. Camille pulled Shane through the bevy of girls, felt for another hidden lever beside the inner door, and pressed it.

In the small inner room, Shane saw Li seated at a table in front of a microphone that stood before a small radio transmitter and receiver. The windowless room was empty save for the table, the radio apparatus, and a divan.

Calm and unruffled, old Li was speaking in some dialect that Shane couldn't understand. He stopped, turned, looked at Camille in gentle inquiry. She spoke rapidly in the same language, and Li turned to Shane.

"Yes, I knew from the first that you would come over to us, Mr. Shane," he said. "This room is of steel. We are safe here until help arrives."

"What about the girls outside?" demanded Shane.

Li smiled. "What about them?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to bring them in?"

"Their presence would disturb our serenity," sighed old Li. "Besides—"

"Wait!" Camille made a sign to Li, who shook his head in assent. She drew Shane to the end of the long, narrow room. Half the blank wall slid back, revealing a long hangar, in which the airplane stood, faintly purring.

"It is for us three," said Camille. "Li, you, and I. At any moment we can be on our way. But we cannot take those girls. You see?"

"I'm not going," said Shane.

Old Li shuffled forward, and laid his hand affectionately on Shane's shoulder. "You are a very foolish young man," he said.

Nevertheless, at Shane's insistence, he stepped aside and let him pass.

CHAPTER IV

Winged Victory

THE girls were huddled into a corner in terrified apathy. But in the center of the room, to Shane's astonishment, was the gross figure of Barron, reeling to and fro.

Camille, who had followed Shane, said, "Mr. Barron has decided to stand by us. He was deceived. He thought he was taking me to safety. He didn't understand who was behind the plot."

Barron was very drunk. "Goo' fellow, Burton," he mumbled. "Ten years ago you couldn't have beat me. Maybe I'll take another crack at you some day."

"How about a crack at Hewlett?" Shane suggested.

Inside the steel rooms, not a sound from the outside had penetrated, but now there came a violent hammering at the door. It flew open, and a dozen of the servants came staggering in. Most of them were bleeding from wounds. Behind them sounded exultant yells of Machado's soldiers, cut off by the closing of the door.

Sledge-hammer blows resounded. The girls were moaning in fear, while the servants staggered about the room uncertainly. Some of them had swords, others revolvers; one man clutched a rifle.

Shane took a sword from the hand of a badly wounded man. Barron came reeling up to him, holding a revolver.

"Crack at Hewlett," he tittered. "By God, they'll have that door down in a minute!"

"Get the girls back into Li's room," Shane told Camille. "We're going to fight it out."

Camille said, "They can't get the door down."

But the door was cracking under the pounding blows of sledgehammers. It sagged inward, and a yelling crowd of Anamese soldiers came swarming over it.

It was Barron who headed the charge. Before they could free themselves from the wreck of the door, and aim their rifles, he was in their midst, emptying his revolver, then using his fists. He snatched a rifle from a fallen man and laid about him, while close upon his heels came Shane, un-

able to use his sword, though, without hurting Barron.

The Anamese broke and fled. With wild yells the servants streamed after them, Barron at their head. Shane, failing to stop them, followed. He heard a volley; then, emerging into the gardens, he saw Barron lying dead, with the back of his head blown in. The servants were scattering among the bushes.

Hewlett's voice came, cool and jeering, from the shrubbery: "Don't make a false move, Burton. I've got a platoon and a couple of tommy-guns.

"Burton—well, Burton, you've played your hand. You've lost. I've got the ship, and I'm bringing up a gun to blow Li's house about his ears. But I can still use you, ah—Burton. I need your certificate on that consignment. I'm willing to overlook your little aberration. Bring Camille out, and we'll negotiate."

Almost while he was speaking the incredibly swift tropical dawn had begun to spread across the gardens. The moon paled; there was a pearly opalescence in the air.

Suddenly Shane was aware of Camille at his side. Out of the shrubs came Hewlett's mocking laughter. Shane caught glimpses of the blue-clad Anamese about him. Others were coming up along the aloe hedge.

"Go back, for God's sake! Take Li away in the plane!" Shane whispered.

"Last call, Shane," jeered Hewlett, through the white mist of dawn that had crept up from the sea.

SUDDENLY a fiercer outburst of yelling came from out of the mist. And, swarming into the gardens and along the seafront, came a horde of the brown natives, wielding short curved swords, and howling like devils as they precipitated themselves upon the Anamese soldiery.

Hewlett fired. Shane flung Camille to the ground, then leaped through a hail of bullets into the mist. Hewlett stood before him, gun in hand, peering. All about them the sound of battle raged, but they two seemed alone.

Shane's sword dashed aside the muzzle of Hewlett's gun. There was no time to parley now. Shane slashed, and the cry on Hewlett's lips changed to a whining whistle as he dropped, cut through the throat.

Shane turned and saw Camille. He caught her in his arms. "I love you. I've loved you since I saw you," he said. "Tell me—this may be our end—tell me!"

"Didn't you know?" she answered gently. "I was only afraid—that you would think—I cared for Hewlett. Li said—"

Li's Number One Wife! Shane had forgotten that. It seemed incredible. He released Camille and stood staring at her, until she seized him by the arm. "Back!" she cried.

They raced beneath the bullets that were whining overhead. Machado's men seemed to be putting up a stiff resistance, but the exultant yells of the aborigines showed who would be the victors. As they ran back, a droning sounded high overhead. Looking up through the thinning mists,

Shane saw the black speck of a plane, high in the sky.

It soared against its background of the golden dawn, it swooped. . . .

Crash! A bomb dropped in the gardens, and the jar shook the earth. The plane was winging up into the ether, circling on its course. Crash! Another bomb, so near that it flung Camille to the ground.

Shane picked her up and ran. The inner door was open. Shane saw old Li still at the table, and the Chinese girls huddled behind him.

The hangar doors were open. Camille ran through. Following her, to try to stop her, Shane only succeeded in gaining the cockpit behind her as the plane raced along the runway and took off into the sky.

Down by the wharf, and all along the aloe hedge, Shane saw the corpses of the fallen fighters. The brown men were swarming everywhere, and resistance seemed to have ceased. The *godowns* were a fiery shell.

IT WAS queer, sitting behind Camille again, seeing her back and profile. How Shane wished he had learned to fly better when he used to go on jaunts with Burton!

Camille turned and smiled at him, gestured to him to adjust his safety-belt. Shane hooked it, and watched the bomber climbing over him. When it was almost directly overhead, another bomb came dropping. It crashed below, sending the plane into wild gyrations.

The bomber circled and winged down. Camille right-ruddered,

and a vicious burst of machine-gun fire perforated a wing. A wire snapped with a shrill whine. The bomber climbed again. Camille shot upward. Then earth and sky revolved in a dizzy maze for Shane. It was his first experience of an *immelmänn*.

Shane saw Camille's hand upon the gun-trip. The bomber winged up, and a blast of lead shattered the instrument panel. The bomber passed so near that Shane could recognize Otarō, the murderous little Jap, at the bomber's wheel.

Camille slumped in her cockpit. In the bright sunshine Shane saw her silk blouse grow bright with blood.

He flung off his belt and threw himself forward over the fuselage. He caught the gun-trip in his hand, saw that Camille was still controlling the stick, waited, and knew Otarō would come into his sight, because he had to die. He saw him in alignment. It was a desperate chance, from the position Shane occupied, but perhaps it was Shane's rage that worked the miracle.

For, as the gun chattered, the bomber rocked, seemed to hang nose downward between heaven and earth, and then went down in a cloud of smoke that swiftly changed to a sheet of fire.

"I can—land," cried Camille.

But Shane was addressing the dead thing plummeting down in widening circles within the plane.

No, my friend," he said, you were right. You certainly are not a Samurai."

Camille brought the plane to a bumpy landing. Shane pulled her from the cockpit and tore off her

blouse, revealing the rounded beauty of her bosom. Blood was oozing from a flesh wound beneath one rounded breast, but the bullet had merely cut the flesh and passed out again.

"I must tell you—if I am dying," whispered Camille. "I sent that poor little Chinese girl to you, to try to find out—what you knew—what you were going to do."

"You're going to live for me," said Shane. Then he remembered again.

"You are Li's wife."

A faint smile trembled on her lips. "Li has no wife. I am like those little girls, a refugee from war-ridden China, whom he brought here out of the kindness of his heart."

He took her in his arms gently. "Forgive me for what I've thought," he begged her.

CAMILLE rested on the divan. Li touched Shane on the shoulder, and he got up from beside her.

"I think you are wanted on the radio," said Li.

The voice that came out of the ether made Shane jump. It was impossible not to recognize that of Madame Chiang.

"The Generalissimo is very pleased with you," she said. "He knows all about it, and hopes to see you again soon, here in Chungking. You know Han Mow is dead? Poor Han Mow! It happened very suddenly. He had trouble with his head."

"I am not surprised, madame," said Shane.

"We are looking forward to welcoming you and your bride, Mr. Shane."

"Why—er—madame—"

But the radio had gone dead

Tropic Talisman

(Continued from page 29)

post; rammed the throttle shut. To Diana Rand he shouted: "Got to get her to first aid! There's medical kits in the concealed hangar under Camino Trestle. If we can carry her down there and doctor her, we'll still have a chance to fight Heinboch off!"

But the ancient wood-burner plunged down-grade with no loss of speed as Churchill starved his drivers. Gravity had gripped the engine in a tugging, invisible fist—and the curving trestle was dead ahead!

There were no air brakes on the

antiquated locomotive. Brick Churchill set his strength against the hand brake's iron wheel. He heard the snap of a broken link rod, the drag of loosened shoes. The wood-burner was out of control, a downgrade runaway!

No time now to horse the Johnson bar into reverse and squirt steam into the cylinders. Not with Heinboch's Diesel car rocketing closer, its savage speed safe because the Nazis had air brakes to use when the need came. "We can't do anything but jump!"

Churchill panted. "If we stay on his thing, we'll be killed!"

He slid an arm around Diana's slender waist. His other arm encompassed the wounded peon girl. He poised himself.

Lolita squirmed weakly, her soft curves brushing his chest. "Put me down . . . save yourself and your loved one . . ." Suddenly she fluttered her lips to Churchill's mouth in a last salute. Then, freeing herself, she shoved him with unexpected strength.

With Diana in his embrace, he toppled into the night. Tropic ferns cushioned them as they landed. Churchill saw the runway engine plunge out upon the curving trestle. "God—!"

For an instant the locomotive clung to its rails. Then it was plucked sidewise by centrifugal force. It lifted, careened—and went smashing down into the draw like a blazing meteor. It struck bottom at the very mouth of the underground airplane hangar far below; the hangar where Nazi bombers awaited the day of possible attack on the Panama Canal.

A thunderclap of hideous sound vomited upward. That was the boiler exploding under steam pressure too great for it to hold—steam pressure impossible to measure after the gauge had been shattered by a bullet. The blast was earth-shaking, like the eruption of a volcano. And it brought the cave-like hangar's roof collapsing on planes and billeted pilots, obliterating them under tons of shale forever.

And thus Lolita went to her Valhalla; in death she had wiped

out Nazi air-menace to a flag she had despised in life.

CHURCHILL turned away from the scene of destruction below him. "She's gone," he said to Diana. "But there's still Heinboch and his three cutthroats—and *here they come!*"

The auburn-haired girl fused herself to him. "Brick—don't try to fight them! Hide—with me! I can't stand any more!" She tempted him with her lips, her surging breasts, her swaying feminine body.

He held her for a brief moment, reveling in her nearness, savoring the delicious warmth of her sweet contours. Then: "It's a job I've got to do, darling. Heinboch and all he stands for must be rooted out of Guadalupe. And he's got to pay for the things he did to you. . . ."

Already the Diesel-electric car had squealed to a halt at the approach to the trestle. Heinboch and his three brown-shirts were piling out, running forward. They raved gutterally when they saw the irreparable damage done by the exploded locomotive below. Vengeance thirst fanned them out, searching the underbrush to see if anybody had survived the blast.

Brick Churchill knew he was one against four. He was unarmed against a quartette of trigger-furious killers—

Unarmed?

He felt a weight sagging in his coat pocket. A Luger! It was the automatic with which Lolita had impeded pursuit, back at the plantation clearing. She must have

thrust it into his pocket when she gave him that farewell kiss. It was a token; a tropic talisman—a message of hope from beyond death!

Hefting it, Churchill smiled grimly. Then, pushing Diana away from him, he walked forward into the open.

Heinboch wasn't in sight, but his three henchmen were. They spotted Churchill, made for him. Stabs of flame blossomed from hot gun-muzzles. Slugs whined through the darkness.

Churchill swerved and kept going. Deliberately he squeezed his own trigger, husbanding his shots. A Nazi screamed and went down with his skull ripped open by the passage of a bullet. Another staggered over the brink of the gorge, his gullet torn out. The third tried to run. Churchill plugged him through the spine.

Then Heinboch lunged into the slash of light from the Diesel car's headlamp. Churchill, too, was in that path of brilliance. He raised Lolita's Luger, triggered it—and heard only a metallic click. The clip was spent, the last slug gone. And Heinboch was moving in with a full gun, grinning his anticipation of the kill.

Churchill knew he could expect no quarter. And he knew that if he died now, Washington would never get the information it needed concerning Nazi activities in Guadalombia. Fifth columnists would continue their work, unsuspected, untouched. A new secret airbase would be constructed. . . .

"Never! he roared. And he hurled his useless Luger.

It smashed Heinboch's gun-

hand. The Nazi yelped, dropped his weapon. This was Churchill's moment. He lunged at his enemy.

MAN against man, now. Churchill with a useless left fist, scalded by steam from that locomotive's smashed gauge. And Heinboch's right hand equally damaged by the hurled Luger. A battle of wounded men; a struggle from which only one could emerge alive. And perhaps a nation's fate swinging in the balance. . . .

Churchill slugged at his enemy's mouth; connected. In return he took a belly-smash that doubled him over, left him gasping. The Nazi had the advantage now. He battered Churchill with sharp, slicing uppercuts that straightened him and cut his face to ribbons. The American yielded ground; struck out blindly. He felt the squishy splash of a ruptured eyeball on his knuckles and knew he had destroyed Heinboch's left eye.

He tried to stay on the German's blind side. But Heinboch was smart. He circled, lashed out with his foot, tripped Churchill. The American went down.

Heinboch jumped at him with both boots. Churchill saw it coming; brought up his own heels. He caught the Nazi full on the chest.

The breath coughed out of Heinboch's lungs as they collapsed. He flew backward, struggling for balance. An eerie scream bubbled to his lips as he lost his footing, realized he couldn't save himself. Then he fell from the trestle, and his shriek died out in a horrid plop-sound far below as

he struck the bottom of the gorge.

Dazed, like a man emerging from nightmare, Brick Churchill stumbled away. Diana came pelting up to him. Her arms steadied him, and her vibrant young body seemed to send strength into his battered frame. "Brick . . . Brick, darling!"

"The road's clear now," he mumbled. "We'll make it to the harbor. There's an American destroyer there; we can use its

radio to transmit our report to Washington. Every Nazi agent will be rooted out of Guadalombia before another month passes. Come, my sweet."

They climbed into the Diesel-electric car. Churchill notched the control-handle forward gently; sent the vehicle into smooth motion over the curving trestle. Beside him, Diana Rand nestled; ahead lay the soft tropic night and the end of all travail.

White Man's Magic

(Continued from 41)

from the Wadi kingdom to civilization and America!

The ghostly figure of the second warrior was almost at the doorway. The guard within nodded to him with grave dignity, then returned his regard to the bound prisoner. Behind the guard the newcomer halted and aimed his spear with deliberation.

Laughlin was spellbound. He suspected his mind of playing tricks on him. It seemed incredible that the newcomer should thrust his spear mightily into the back of the guard, and that the guard should fall upon his face silently while dark blood spurted over the white paint between his shoulder blades.

And then Laughlin knew that these things had actually happened, and he was not mad, but only unbelievably lucky. For Tumba, the Masai, was speaking through his mask of chalk, which cracked in a wide grin.

"Bwana, we can escape from

these wicked devils. I have hidden your magic boxes in a safe place and here is your big rifle. I can lead you back to your own people so swiftly that the Wadis will never overtake us."

Tumba was on his knees, tearing the bark from his master's wrists and ankles. In a matter of seconds Laughlin arose, flexing his limbs, feeling new hope swell within him.

"You shall be repaid a thousand times, Tumba," he said in Bantu, striving to keep his voice at that impersonal pitch a white man must use to a Masai if he wishes to be respected. "But we cannot flee yet. There is a woman, she whom the Wadis call the White Witch, who is not a witch at all, but a girl of my own race. She will go with us."

Tumba's eyes stared from their chalky sockets. "But she is only a woman, Bwana! Why should you risk your life for her? The Wadis will put her to the fire test

to see whether she is really a goddess, and they are too many for us to attack. We could never hope to slay them."

Laughlin drew himself to his full height. "Do you doubt my power over them? Have you forgotten that I know how to make great magic?"

"No, Bwana." The Masai was distressed. "Tumba has not forgotten. You have only to speak the word and I shall do whatever you command." He added dismally, "Every man must die sometime, and tonight can be no worse than some other night."

LAUGHLIN'S brain raced at top speed, shaping daring plans. Magic—that was what he needed to paralyze the Wadis with fear. Guns could not prevail against them, but magic could. And in his pack, which Tumba had hidden in the bush, were the implements of magic!

He snatched the heavy express rifle from the servant. He snapped, "Hurry—bring the things which you have hidden. Make your feet like the wind, Tumba, and we will yet show the Wadis we are not the kind to flee!"

He turned to the couch, to which the fragrance of Pearl Akin still clung, and began to gather skins and mats in his arms. . . .

The drums in the village, which had been muttering for half an hour, commenced a sullen thundering. Laughlin heard shrieks of excitement, yells of hysterical laughter. The voodoo doctor, then, had decided upon a test of the White Witch's divinity that met

with the enthusiastic approval of the cruel natives.

Laughlin perched on the horizontal poles that strengthened the hut beneath its conical roof. He had broken out a part of the grass matting that shingled it and through the opening he had thrust a long tube made of the skins and mats, rolled around the shafts of the spears of the two dead warriors.

Through the tube, as through the barrel of a telescope without a lens, Laughlin could see the massed Wadis in the center of the circle of huts. He saw them move away from the spot where the wizened man of magic crouched on his stool and gather about a great fire that flamed redly. He saw the body of Pearl Akin gleaming in the firelight and heard the long murmur of anticipation rise from a hundred throats.

He dared not think of failure. If he could not save Pearl, he asked nothing more than to die, too. Otherwise his life would be a long nightmare in which he would witness her death over and over again.

The warriors hurled the platinum-haired girl to the earth beside the fire and other warriors drove four stakes above her shoulders and below her feet. She lay on her back, nude and helpless and lovely. Thongs were bound about her ankles and wrists separately and then lashed to the four stakes. She was spread-eagled, stretched taunt, unable to move before the gloating eyes of her tormentors.

A withering flame of anger swept through Laughlin as he understood what was intended. He

had heard of that savage test for divinity in which red hot coals were heaped upon the belly of the one who had posed as a god but was suspected of being mortal. If the fire ate through the soft flesh into the bowels, the screaming victim was no god—was, in fact, very quickly a charred corpse. But if the victim survived, unharmed by the fire. . . .

LAUGHLIN growled a mighty oath. He could not fail now, could not let the woman who had come so sweetly to his arms suffer that awful agony.

It was time for Tumba, who had already brought Laughlin's pack from the bush and had been dispatched to the farther side of the village, to act. The witch doctor was stooping over the fire, scooping up coals on the edge of a shield. . . .

What in God's name was delaying Tumba?

Laughlin had caught up the express rifle and thrust its barrel into the improvised tubing, levering a shell into the firing chamber, when the first lightning flashed. It came not from the heavens, but from the earth beyond the village—a towering column of blinding white fire. It hung in the air for a second, swallowing up the moon-glow and absorbing the glare of the bonfire, then vanished—and a heavy *boom!* rolled over the countryside.

The devil-drums faltered in their beat. Black hands went to bulging eyes, trying to rub out the blazing reflections of the flash. The excited voices faded and a pall of fear hung over the kraal,

heavy as the gray smoke that was billowing up in the moonlight where the pillar of fire had been.

The witch doctor went rigid, his scoop of embers spilling over his unshod feet. The pain reached his stunned brain abruptly, and he howled and danced. He issued angry orders, pointing to the smoke, and two warriors left the kraal and loped reluctantly toward the forest.

The old man stooped again for fire. He gathered a glowing heap of coals on the shield and stood with his back to the blaze, facing the staked girl—and Laughlin. This time Laughlin did not wait for the miraculous flare. He lined the sights of the big rifle carefully on the murderous priest of evil and squeezed the trigger.

The roar of the gun came back through the bulky tubing and deafened Laughlin, but he was quite sure no sound of the shot could reach the ears of the natives. The makeshift silencer might not be perfect, but it would muffle the explosion of a cartridge sufficiently to prevent its being heard above the thumping of the drums.

However, if no sound reached the village, the .475 bullet arrived there in a tiny fraction of a second and created havoc. Its full ton impact struck the witch doctor in the breastbone and hurled him off his scrawny legs, backward into the blazing fire. His body twitched just once as the flames enfolded it hungrily, and then the broad shield descended over it and a cloud of greasy smoke billowed upward.

An instant later two blinding pillars of fire leaped simultane-

ously at one side of the kraal and a double explosion shook the earth.

Now the noise of drums ceased altogether and the jungle echoed with wail and cries. There was no movement among the terror-ridden Wadis to rescue the voodoo priest from the flames which were consuming his wickedness. Instead every man, woman and child in the village fell forward, knees and forehead to the earth, in attitude of worship.

One warrior crawled fearfully toward Pearl, groveling in the dirt. He moved around her, keeping his face averted, slashing the thongs that bound her, one by one. She stood up, slim and defiant, settling the disordered kirtle around her slim thighs—a goddess one more. . . .

LAUGHLIN laughed exultantly. He dropped from the rafters to the ground, snatched a small can from his pack and sprinted toward the kraal. He slung the rifle over his shoulder as he neared the edge of the village, punched a hole in the can with the tongue of his belt buckle, inserted a length of fuse and lighted it. He hurled the can far in front of him.

The magnesium powder, intended for use in making night photographs, exploded with a deep-throated rumble. Laughlin shielded his eyes with his hands as the column of unbearably bright flame ascended, then walked through the thick smoke that was left in its wake.

The Wadis, he knew, would not be able to clear their eyes of the brilliance for many seconds after

it had vanished, even if their eyelids had been closed when it burst forth. It would appear to them that he had materialized magically out of the blinding brightness.

He walked swiftly to Pearl's side, placed his arm around her and smiled into her incredulous eyes. In his smile was more than triumph: there was promise of a greater and happier adventure to come, with the outcome never in doubt.

He saw Tumba peering from the shelter of a hut and beckoned him into the center of the kraal. He commanded Tumba, "Tell them the White Witch is angry and will leave them, but that she is also merciful and will spare their worthless lives."

Tumba translated the message into the Wadi dialect, and the blacks looked at one another, marveling that one so great should trouble to show mercy.

"Tell them," Laughlin continued, "that the goddess has called us from a great distance to take her to a far-away kraal. Tell them we must have many porters to carry the ivory tusks they have gathered for her, to repay her for sparing them."

The words were spoken, and the natives received them with grunts and nods of assent.

Laughlin took Pearl Akin's arm and led her through the circle of kneeling blacks, doubting whether it would be wise to hug and kiss her in front of them, even though her divinity had been proved to their complete satisfaction. With a lifetime ahead of them, they could afford to wait a few minutes longer. . . .

"You ought to believe in magic always," he murmured. "Because of it you're rescued, you're rich, and when we reach America you'll be famous."

She leaned against him, as if

impatient for the caresses he was withholding. "You don't mean me," she replied, and there was a catch of emotion in her voice. "You mean *us*, Rex—always."

He smiled and nodded.

Space Burial

(Continued from page 53)

twilight, challenging Bill's daring.

Castle or ship? Bill had swerved aside the moment that the ship came into his optoscope. His own was so much smaller, there was a chance he hadn't been seen. He rounded the irregular mass of Nestor and anchored a bare three hundred miles from Jeribald's vessel, hidden from it and also from the castle by a ridge of rocks.

"Bill, what are you going to do?" Astra pleaded.

Bill braked his g.e. auxiliary, and felt the *Girl Unknown* quivering under the gravitational strain. On Nestor a man needed more than half-ton boots; he needed a Jonesite gauge to prevent being pulled up to the skies like a fish out of water. Bill handed one to Astra, explaining to her to keep it on her person, another to Vulcan. He reckoned that drag would hold them.

"Get your pistol, Vulcan. We're going to take that ship," he said.

Astra screamed, "He'll blast you to annihilation. And what will I do then? I love you, Bill."

"I'm putting you ashore," said Bill. "If I don't come back, go to the castle. I guess Jeribald will

save your life. And don't lose that gauge I gave you, or it'll be your finish."

"But he's expecting you at the castle. He's planning to talk business there."

"That's why I'm going to the ship instead," said Bill.

Their pultex air-masks over their heads, the three went through the lock. But the bubbles in the eye-lenses showed that there was air on Nestor, and they threw back their hoods and went ashore. Astra cried, and clung to Bill, but he forced her roughly away. He had made his plans. Jeribald wouldn't dream he would dare attack the ship; once master of it, he could hold the castle under the threat of the neutron gun and exact what terms he chose.

But he meant to kill Jeribald, for Houghton and little Danny Briggs were crying in his heart for vengeance.

He looked at Vulcan. "Ready?" he asked.

"Qui'e rea'y, Mas'er," said Vulcan.

The Martian was a mechanical adept, like all his race. No need to explain the Jonesite gauge to him. Slowly Bill turned the handle from ten to eight, shutting

off the interior power. Now he was rocking on his feet. Seven—and he soared upward through the air, pulling his hood about his head. Six—and his flight accelerated as the pull of Jupiter overcame the Jonesite counterpoise. Five—four, and Vulcan and he were flying arrow-like toward the ship, which was swiftly nearing.

Bill twirled the needle back to six and checked his flight. Vulcan, ahead of him, slowed too. Cautiously they drew near, approaching from the stern end, so as to be out of range of the swivel neutron gun. Seven—and Bill moved forward no faster than a fish swims. He grasped the near fin of the propeller and swung himself through the lock.

Instantly he heard ribald shouts and laughter coming from the interior. He burst through the inner door, into the midst of Jeribald's ruffians. Tuck he recognized instantly by his belly-girth, but Garrou wasn't there. Instead, there were three others, whose faces seemed familiar; probably Bill had seen them on Hungaria, where Jeribald had signed them on. Each of the four held a girl upon his knee, a nectarine, of course, picked up by Jeribald from the outer planetoids. The girls were laughing. The air stank with the smell of liquor.

Before any of the startled men could pull a pistol, Bill had fired. His weapon blasted Tuck into a smouldering cinder. One of the others leaped, and a streak from Bill's pistol whipped his arm from his shoulder. The man dropped,

screeching horribly. A whisp of ray drew a black line across Bill's cheek, and the pain rocked him. He fired, and the third man was down, the look of amazement ludicrous upon his blackening face. The flame of the fourth man's pistol shot over Bill's head. The two collided, staring at each other, and then Vulcan's shot drew a black hemisphere upon the other's cheek, and he fell, instantly dead, his withered tongue protruding from the blackened corner of his mouth.

BILL turned to the cowering girls. "Where's Ursula?" he shouted.

They didn't understand, but one, bolder than the rest, came sidling forward with arms outstretched and quivering haunches. Bill thrust her away, ran to the hold entrance and pulled off the hatch cover. He leaped down. It was almost dark within, but it was light enough for him to see that Ursula wasn't there. In the castle, then. Bill scampered up again. He heard a muffled outcry. Vulcan and Blacky, Jeribald's man at the controls, were in deadly combat. But no Martian would kill a Martian. Even an Earth-man wouldn't kill a Martian, which brought bad luck. The two were rolling over and over and punnelling each other.

But Jeribald's ship was now outside Jeribald's castle, and three neutron guns were covering her at a distance of a few yards with their slender muzzles. Blacky had worked the trick while Bill was fighting with Jeribald's crew.

Upon a platform just beneath

the muzzles of the guns were Jeribald, Garrou, Ursula and Astra. Ursula's robe had been stripped from her, and for the first time Bill saw the rounded curves of her, the softness of her breasts. Even in that moment of despair a thrill went through him.

"Bill!" she cried, stretching out her arms to him.

Bill sprang to her and clasped her to him, feeling new strength fill him at the pressure of her soft body. Holding her, he looked up at Jeribald.

"You think you've won," he said.

"It looks like it—it looks like it, Sparling," sneered Jeribald through his black beard. He raised his voice. "Tuck!" he called.

Bill laughed. "Tuck's dead. So are the rest," he said. "I wish you'd been there, you damned murderer."

Garrou was covering him with his gun. Astra, beside him, was mouthing viciously at Bill. "You poor fool, Jeribald left me orders to bring you to him," she scoffed.

"Very pretty," said Bill. "So—what?"

Jeribald took Bill's neutron pistol from his unresisting hand. "Well, you can guess, Sparling," he answered. "You've been a damned pest on the Jonesite grounds for a long time, and I'd already earmarked that claim you staked out. 'Get back into the ship!'"

He waved Bill back. Ursula screamed and clung to him. Garrou forced her away. Bill went berserk then. He leaped at Garrou and struck him a blow that

sent him reeling. Jeribald's obscene laugh drowned Ursula's cries.

"Don't be a fool, Sparling," he said. "Maybe I can use you after all. We'll talk later."

He shouted, and a dozen Martians came swarming out of the castle. They seized Bill and dragged him into the ship, and down into the hold.

But, as he was pulled past the controls, Bill saw Vulcan on the floor, fast asleep. This was his Martian sleeping-time, like that of all the Martian races, adjusted to the long night and day of their planet. Nothing could wake Vulcan till his sleep-period was over.

RAGING, Bill crouched in the hold, under the guard of the Martians. They had no neutron guns, but even one of the wiry little fellows was more than a match for the strongest Earthman, apart from the paralyzing sting each carried in his stump of a tail.

He hadn't been there long before other Martians appeared, driving a bevy of nude nectarines before them—Jeribald's plunder of the inner asteroids. Young, half-afraid, yet laughing, and all excited by the prospect of the visit to Earth, they trooped in until the hold was filled with them. They had been anointed and perfumed in Jeribald's castle. That perfume, filling the stagnant air, was designed to allure. In the press of the jostling girls, Bill felt his head begin to swim, his mind to wander.

Ursula—Astra—what was one woman more or less? Life was rich among the planetoids, with

wealth to be gained, and women for the asking. If Jeribald intended to make him an offer, was he going to refuse, and go to certain death?

On the other hand, Bill didn't feel that there was room in the same universe for Jeribald and himself. If only he had some weapon. . . .

He had slipped his Jonesite gauge into his shirt. It was of old-fashioned magnetic steel, hard enough to break a man's head with, but only eight inches long. A fantastic weapon. . . . Bill's brain began to clear. He pushed away the girls who jostled him. He must think only of Ursula.

Garrou came toward him, leering at the nectarines. In his right hand was a pistol. He motioned Bill to precede him, up the steps out of the hold, onto the stern deck.

Jeribald was there, with Ursula and Astra, a group of Martians about them. Astra snarled and spat at Bill as he approached. Jeribald said:

"I've been thinking about what I'll do with you. I don't throw things or men away when I can use them. This damned girl's been holding me off. I've made your life the price I'm willing to pay. You sign over your Jonesite claim to me, I'll have the registration transferred, and take Ursula. How about that, Sparling?"

"You can go to hell," said Bill. For though Ursula hadn't spoken a word, he had read her answer in her eyes. No, rather death for both of them.

"That's final, Sparling."

Bill sprang at the man, bringing his gauge down in a sweeping

stroke. He missed Jeribald's head, but the heavy implement slashed Jeribald's ear and half-severed it.

With a howl of rage and pain, Jeribald snatched Garrou's neutron pistol from his hand and leveled it—then checked himself.

"Bury them both!" he shrieked, dabbing at his ear. "I'll watch them die—die slow! Into the lock with them!"

Prepared for the worst though he was, Bill's blood ran cold with the realization of the fate in store for him. The slow descent, foot by foot, toward Jupiter, increasing—while Jeribald's ship kept pace, so that he could gloat over them. The quickening tempo of the flight, until Ursula and he would spin with inconceivable velocity, hour after hour, toward the giant planet, fully conscious, until its heat engulfed them.

In that moment everything about Bill was preternaturally clear. He saw the castle, and another bevy of nude girls on the platform in front of it; he saw the pain-distorted face of Jeribald, with Garrou at his side, and Astra, spitting out curses. His gaze went forward—and then he saw that it wasn't Blacky at the wheel, but Vulcan.

The Martian had somehow awakened, at the very beginning of his long sleep—out of loyalty to his master, as Bill thought afterward. And Blacky lay beside Vulcan, looking as if he had been stunned, his stumpy tail feebly twitching.

Ursula and Bill were seized and flung into the lock. The door closed on them.

"I'm ready to die, dearest," said the girl. "I know you came for me,

didn't you? Poor dad! They murdered him while he was asleep. I'm glad we're dying together, Bill."

She moved toward him, and then his arms were about her, holding her fast, and her arms were around his neck. They'd go together into eternity in that way.

A lever clanged, the outer door of the lock opened; the two were hurled into the void. Suddenly Bill laughed. Why, Ursula had no pul-tex over her, no mask. She would freeze painlessly to death in a moment, even before she suffocated in the airless depths.

AND all the while Bill held the Jonesite gauge in his hand, and had forgotten.

Not far away he saw his own ship lying offshore. He saw Jeribald's ship suddenly careen upward, like a startled horse. Saw it all in the first instant of their plunge, felt himself and Ursula dragged slowly away from the shore of Nestor; then saw a chance of life for both of them—a hope—the surety.

He shot the indicator to the bottom of his gauge, turning on the full force of the emanations from the Jonesite within. Pull against pull—a little Jonesite gauge against the vast power of Jupiter. Instantly the movement ceased. And, lying oscillating in the atmosphere around the planet, Bill began striking a course toward his own ship.

But as he did so he saw Jeribald's ship shoot like a rocket toward Jupiter and disappear.

He swam through the air, dragging Ursula with him. She lay

against his breast, her arms about his neck, her bosom crushed against him. Faster and faster, till Bill was compelled to move the indicator back and check the speed. Now he and Ursula were floating beside their ship. Bill reached up and grasped the fin, hooked one arm about it, and, with an immense effort, hauled Ursula after him.

They plunged through the lock and stumbled into the empty interior. They dropped, exhausted.

Leaving Ursula there, Bill tottered to the optoscope. Turning it, he saw the phantom trail of Jeribald's ship, thousands of miles away.

A trail of light, cut off at the extremity of the atmosphere of Nestor. Jeribald was heading straight for Jupiter.

And suddenly Bill understood. Vulcan had overheard, with the supreme auditory faculty of his race. Or, if he hadn't overheard, he had determined that they should all share a common fate. The faithful black man had jammed the g. e. control, rendering the ship unmanageable. The pull of Jupiter had had no counterpoise of Jonesite gas. It was the same as if he had shut off the flow in his own little gas gauge.

Space-burial for Jeribald and Astra and Garrou!

But Bill didn't like to think about the nectarines aboard.

He started his engine, turned about, set a course for Earth, and lashed the wheel.

Then he went back to Ursula. And, in the tightening grip of her white arms, he managed to forget all else.

South Sea Justice

(Continued from page 69)

was drenched with spray; it clung to her bosom and outlined her sleek legs.

"I'm not worried about our house," she said, as she went with him up the steps. "It's sheltered, and high enough above any tidal wave. And so is this one."

HE found boots, and brought them into the living room to put them on; also a canvas jacket, and a searchlight. It was unreal, facing Irinea again. Seeing her beauty was like contemplating the grave of a loyal friend a long time dead.

He put on his hat and turned toward the door. "With a rotten night like this, maybe no one has seen him."

"But they have! Our servants are gone. Oh—what's that?"

He cocked his head, and caught the tump-tumpa-tump-tump that the rustle of wind twisted palms could not muffle. Drums were throbbing in the hills.

"That means, time to go."

She stopped him at the door. "Where's your gun?"

"Shooting won't help this. Just make things worse."

There was a shotgun, taken down and in its case, but Lawton meant just what he said. He went to the rear. A cocoanut thudded to the ground, from one of the old trees that were scattered here and there. Falling from sixty feet, the impact would crush a man's skull. The walk ahead was no pleasure

jaunt. And a spear might interrupt diplomacy.

Then, before he was fairly started, Lawton halted. He turned his flashlight toward the white splotch in the gloom. It was Durbin, stumbling, gasping, clutching something. He fell face forward.

Lawton ran into the house and said to Irinea, "Don't worry. He's just returned. No, don't come. Stay out of sight."

Her face was pale and drawn. "But why?"

"If he saw you, he might not want to tell. But I have to know the truth."

She understood. If a *tabu* had been violated, Marquesan custom demanded punishment, lest the spirits be wrathful. Any white person would do, whether guilty or otherwise.

When Lawton half dragged Durbin into the house, Irinea was nowhere in sight. His head was bleeding. A saw edged sword had glanced, shearing thin strips from the scalp, and his hands were red. One still clutched a heavy knife; the blade, broken and nicked, was bloody.

Then Durbin opened his other hand. He had a small pouch of pearls, large and iridescent, perhaps bought or stolen by a trader, and later taken from the wreck of his ship. Whatever their history, they were *tabu*.

Lawton's guess was that the loot had belonged to a blackbird who had won such hatred that

everything pertaining to him belonged to the gods; his skull included, and of course his flesh, eaten at a ritual banquet, years ago.

"You went and did it," Lawton slowly said. "You idiot!"

"I'm broke. I told Irinea I'd take her to the States, and I'm going to. Before—before I make a chump of myself, bungling things on this plantation. Sure I made a mess. I can't handle these natives, this place. I don't understand them like you do. Now I don't have to."

He gulped a drink. He was pouring a second when Irinea emerged from the hall. She reproached. "It wasn't money I was interested in."

He listened as she explained her presence. When she wiped the blood from his face, he blurted, "But I can't back down. One of them took a swing at me with a wooden sword, and I ducked and knifed him. I've got to get out. Before they catch up."

THE drums were louder. Irinea recoiled. Like Lawton, she read the true story of Durbin's wounds. She slowly said, "*That sword came at you from behind. While you were stabbing someone in front of you. Someone who didn't have a weapon. You killed an unarmed man.*"

Irinea pointed at the clawed marks on his throat and chest.

"I couldn't help it!" he snarled, and leaped to his feet. "I found the stuff, and it's mine. I picked among old skulls for it. A crazy old fellow jumped me and I thought he had a knife, and I was

lucky the one in back didn't brain me."

"I'll take the pearls," Lawton said. "Maybe if they're returned, there will be less trouble with the French law."

"Oh, you will?" Durbin snatched the blade. "Back on your heels, you."

Irinea's eyes were widening. "But now that you know, you don't want them," she said. "Of course they startled you, and you struck."

"Baby, are you crazy? These are worth twenty thousand bucks!"

Lawton cut in, "They're waiting outside, getting up their courage for a rush. They think we have guns."

Durbin shifted, warily, so that his partner would have no chance of snatching his wrist. "I can run out to the front. She and I both can. We'll go in the boat. To the big island. To get married."

"Not with stolen pearls, Vince." Irinea said.

"So that's it, huh? Going religious on me? Okay, good-by—"

"Hold it!" Lawton snapped, and Durbin turned. "You can't go, even if you do want pearls worse than you do her. Someone has to square this with the natives. If you escape with the loot, Irinea or her father, or the old sunshiner in the next cove will be speared. Any one at all."

"Vince, you're all excited. Calm down," Irinea urged. "You don't understand. You don't have to run. Just give up—"

"Bubbles like these? No. And if there's danger, why come along. You too, Red. I'll split the stuff with you. Those niggers won't hurt Irinea's old man, not after

all these years. Maybe me, maybe you because you're my partner, but not her father."

He thought he was smoothing everything over. Irinea said, "You're not so excited, after all. I have been foolish. Very silly, misunderstanding you, and your big city ways of thinking."

"Bye, folks," Durbin had lost the girl, but he had the loot.

Lawton lunged. Durbin twisted, blade held point forward. Lawton tried to avoid the cut, but only half succeeded. He stumbled and Durbin bolted for the verandah. Irinea kept Lawton from rising when he tried.

"You can't chase him—he's got the motor going."

She was tearing strips from her skirt. Lawton thrust her aside. "I'm all right. For a while." He clutched his side, and managed to regain his feet. "I got to stop him."

The motor was sputtering. Lawton yelled above the wind, "You damn' fool, you can't go in this storm."

"What storm?" Durbin cried. "Seen worse on Lake Mich!"

Then Irinea's weight prevailed. She clung to Lawton, ignoring the blood that seeped from his shirt, and made her dress cling to her side.

"Stay here," she pleaded. "You can't get him—look!"

IN the thickening gloom, which blotted out the momentarily exposed moon, tall natives broke from cover and raced toward the beach. The bone spear heads and the teeth of the serrated swords were white. Hurling lances nosed into the wind, but their flight was erratic.

"Get that shotgun—in the case—shells—in the—trunk," Lawton choked, thrusting Irinea from him. "He's made it—they'll come for us now. They're crazy, fighting mad."

She ran into his room. Lawton watched the Marquesans retreating from the water. "Hurry, honey!" he croaked. "They're stalling, but it won't be long."

The wind was howling now. Cocoanuts, blown by the twisting gale, thumped against the roof. Then a moment of silence. The voices of the Marquesans was clear. And Lawton knew why they yelled.

The launch had struck the reef. Foam hid her. An expert swimmer might have saved himself, but Durbin could not. He was pulled under, and he could not come up. Lawton called to Irinea, "Never mind the gun. The boys are satisfied. Going away."

The gods, they reasoned, had settled Durbin; the sea had reclaimed her treasure. Thus, no man's vengeance was needed. Island justice had prevailed. And he was glad now that the girl with the tattooed legs had not quite succeeded.

"Did he make it?" she asked, kneeling beside him.

Lawton stroked her hair, and answered evasively, "They'll never catch him, and he'll never come back. Now, I need a drink, and that scratch—"

She made as if to rise, but paused to say, "Will you kiss me, later?"

"Now, and later, too. And always." In time, he would be sorry for Vince Durbin, who had gone to the sharks with his greed. But now he could think only of Irinea.

"Always," she murmured, "won't be half long enough."

Temple of Eternity

(Continued from page 81)

the most beautiful city ever built. In a few minutes we shall see the palace, built of gold, with white swans upon the lake that surrounds it and white peacocks in its gardens."

"The time-force," he stammered, "—whatever it is that turns time backward—it's spreading!"

"It is as I told you. The hour we have perpetuated here will expand over the world, moving in a widening circle at the rate of a hundred miles a day, until all things are as they were then. The circle will pass over stretches of wilderness and cities will spring up, and it will pass over cities and they will vanish as if they had never been. I ordered Xalo destroyed and the people slain after the pyramid was sealed, knowing that the buildings would rise again and the people return when the temple was opened."

His brain reeled under the immensity of this knowledge. He could not be dreaming: when he pinched himself it hurt, and when he moved two inches to the right he felt the warmth of Kalma's naked arm. The memory of Lea, tormented by fear and uncertainty in the chamber below, was too real to be compounded of fantasy.

"My world and yours," the princess said. "Do you like it?"

"It's more beautiful than I ever imagined it could be."

He knew he was looking upon

that which no man of his day had ever seen, and no man would ever believe if he should tell of it. But if the circle of antiquity kept spreading, there would be none to tell, excepting those to whom Maya's grandeur was familiar.

He watched Xalo grow, building by building, street by street. If the force went out into the world at the rate of a hundred miles a day in all directions, the camp of the Courtney Expedition would be swallowed up in two and a half hours, and the men with whom he had worked would have vanished forever. By this time tomorrow the Mexican city of Campeche would be gone, with hundreds of towns and villages. In a week all of Mexico and Central America would be changed, the Panama Canal would be no more, most of Florida would have gone back to its beginnings.

He remembered New York, Chicago, London, and Paris with a pang. All that men had lived and died for, all the labor and love and spilling of blood for twenty centuries, would have been for nothing. There would have been no Church battling persecution and oppression, slowly conquering evil; no Shakespeare to lift the torch of poetry upon the loftiest peaks of wisdom; no Plato; no Phidias.

What would there be instead? Barbarian hordes spreading rapine and destruction over Europe and the islands of the North Atlantic, mad with the lust of killing; the harsh brutality of the Roman conquest; a world of slaves and masters, with human life cheaper than dirt; a world of fear and ignorance and disease. . . .

"Come down with me," he said to Kalma.

Her curved eyebrows lifted at the sharpness of his tone, but she went with him to the center of the platform and waited while he turned the Key and raised the mirrored sections, and then preceded him wordlessly down the stairway.

He rested his hand upon the butt of his revolver. Her uncanny insight must have told her what was in his mind. She would try to thwart his desperate plan, of course, and it was likely that he would die. But he had to make the attempt, nevertheless.

Better that these long dead people—for he could think of them in no other terms—should continue dead, than that the teeming millions of the Twentieth Century should die to enthrone pride and arrogance in a setting of golden splendor.

His life was a little thing to pay for saving the world. . . .

Kalma ascended her throne ominously. Lea stood alone in the center of a semi-circle of warriors and courtiers, her worried eyes questioning Dick. He went close to her and took her hand.

Facing the princess, he opened his mouth. . . .

"Silence!" Kalma cried. "I know what you have to say, but I will not hear it. You shall be emperor of Maya in spite of anything you can do!"

She raised her voice, giving an order in her own tongue.

Twenty warriors advanced, carrying not spears or swords, but the short metal rods that were part of their equipment. Dick drew his revolver.

"You die if you come a step nearer!" he warned.

A BRONZED arm pointed one of the rods. From its tip flashed a pale beam that touched the shoulder of Dick's jacket, ripping the cloth.

The revolver roared, filling the chamber with thunderous echoes. The guard dropped, his face ludicrous with surprise, blood spurting from his throat.

The others halted, cowed for the moment by this weapon which was strange to them. They had ray projectors and were used to scientific devices beyond anything the modern world had produced, but they found the detonation of cordite terrifying.

Lea waited for the outcome, her chin high, her eyes flashing. She was no longer bewildered. She had been frightened by the unknown, but she was not afraid to die with him.

He was filled with a fierce pride of her.

From the purple cushions of her throne Kalma shouted angrily. Nerved by her words, the warriors rushed. The pale rays leaped from a half-dozen rods, shredding Dick's clothing as he dodged out of their path, rubbing against his skin like solid bars.

He triggered swiftly, spending the last of his bullets. Men dropped, but there were more behind them. It was only a question of time. . . .

One of the rays hit him squarely in the right shoulder. It did not burn or pierce, but its impact hurled him backward and down, as if he had been struck with a sledge-

UNCERTAIN seconds ticked away before a hand touched his shoulder and a soft voice said, "Dick! Oh, Dick—have they killed you?"

His eyes focused blearily on Lea's face. Leaning on her, he managed to struggle erect. He stared around the chamber, vaguely at first, then with sharpened interest as he became aware that once more the impossible had occurred.

The main chamber was deserted except for the two of them. Transparent walls again shut off the galleries, and a frosty mist was gathering over them. Dimly he saw warriors stretched on their couches, copper-skinned girls lying row on row, men sleeping in the small rooms reserved for the more exalted courtiers. Attached to wrist and ankle ornaments of all of them were the golden wires, and there were no signs that any of them had ever been disturbed.

Last of all he looked at Kalma upon her throne. Her face was serene, her beauty so poignant that he trembled. . . .

This time Lea helped him up the long stairs and turned the Key of Life, shutting the sunlight from the temple. Dick stared out over the jungle, where now was no trace of the golden city of Xalo, but where twenty or more naked Indians knelt in attitudes of worship.

"We needn't be afraid of them any more," Lea murmured. "They must think we're gods, or the favorites of gods, because we entered the temple and came out again unharmed."

The sun had passed its zenith and there was a thin strip of shade

hammer, and the revolver dropped from fingers that were all at once paralyzed.

Now he must take the final suicidal chance. In another second it would be too late.

He scrambled toward Kala's throne, where the golden wires that had been attached to her wrists and ankles lay upon the floor. . . .

He knew that a mild force-current had sustained life within the pyramid through the ages. But the current was no longer mild: the generators were racing under the power of direct sunlight and the force had grown so powerful that it was altering the face of the earth.

If he could grip those wires and short-circuit that potent force through his own body. . . .

A man sprang upon his back, clubbing one of the ray rods. Dick twisted, catching the warrior's wrist, staving off the blow. He bent forward from the waist, jerking the Mayan's arm. It was a wrestler's trick he had learned in college, and it worked as neatly now as it had on the gymnasium mats.

Grunting in surprise, the bronzed fellow shot over Dick's shoulders. He sprawled heavily upon the floor before the throne, on which Kalma suddenly cowered in terror. The warrior's knee rested upon one of the golden wires, and as he tried to rise his hand touched the other.

A flash of red fire blinded Dick. There was a hideous crackling in the air. He was caught in a terrific concussion and flung bodily against the platform in the center of the chamber, his brain spinning like a top. . . .

at the opposite side of the platform. They rested there.

Dick said, "That nightmare machinery of theirs was *making* time, Lea—spinning it like cloth out of solar energy. I can't explain it, but the force it generates must be the same stuff of which time is made, except that it operates in reverse, reconstructing things while ordinary time deteriorates them.

"The credit was charged to capacity with the time-stuff. The flow had to be continuous, not only to extend its range of influence, but to maintain what had already been established. If ancient Maya had returned, its existence would have depended upon the infallibility of the machines, and so it would never have been real in a natural sense, but the greatest illusion ever known. It sounds screwy, but that's the only way it could have been.

"When the body of that Mayan closed the circuit, releasing the potential that had been built up and should have been renewed constantly, all that had been accomplished evaporated. Everything and everyone returned to the point at which we first arrived. The men we killed aren't dead. As far as they are concerned, the things we saw happen didn't happen at all. The only casualty is me, with a sore shoulder and a million bruises, and I wouldn't have them if my life had depended upon the illusion of the time-force."

"Supposing someone else blunders into the pyramid?" she said. "Supposing the machinery is started again?"

"If it has been hidden for two

thousand years, no one will be apt to find it before I can come back with an army of scientists. We'll cover the mirrors, study the machines and find a way to control the force. Maybe we can recreate a Mayan kingdom in Yucatan without destroying the rest of the world."

Her eyes narrowed. "Count me in on the party, Dick. I'll never let you go without me. As soon as Kalma smiled at you, I knew she wanted you for herself. And she was so **good-looking—in a flashy way**—that I was actually afraid of losing you!"

"You'll never lose me," he said.

Being human, he sighed for the Emperor Dick who might have lived in a golden palace with white swans in a private lake and white peacocks in exotic gardens. But it was only a little sigh, and did not include the golden empress who would have shared that palace. Lea was snuggled against him, and in that moment he knew that her kisses were worth more than all the gold in the world.

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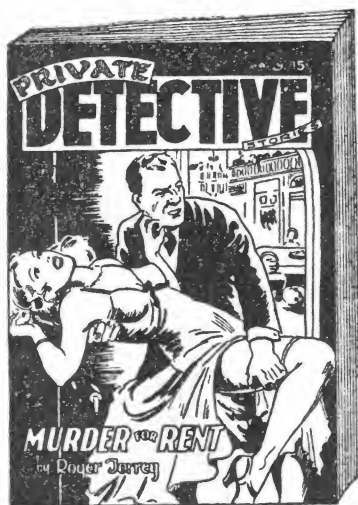


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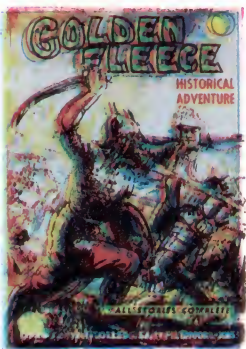
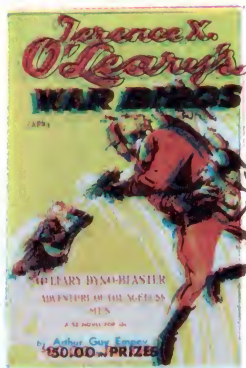
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